

AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

ISSUE 15

PLUS

**ANDRANIK
TEYMOURIAN**

Iran captain
focused on
Road to Russia 2018



**Quarter-Final
Preview**

WU LEI

China star firing club and
country to Asian glory

ISSUE
15

July 2016



KUNISHIGE KAMAMOTO

Japan's Olympic icon retells the journey to Asia's first football medal at the 1968 Summer Games in Mexico



CHAN YUEN-TING

Eastern's female coach makes global headlines and history in Hong Kong with record-setting league title success



BHAICHUNG BHUTIA

India legend looks to the future with the AFC U-16 Championship on the horizon

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Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



Dear friends,

After a spectacular first six months of 2016, Asian football enters the second half of this year with formidable progress on many fronts, both off and on the field.

The Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) flagship club competitions – the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup – continue to capture the imagination of passionate fans from across the continent as we enter the knockout stages of both competitions.

As we approached the quarter-finals, I am pleased to note that we will have four debutants in the AFC Champions League and eight countries represented in the AFC Cup this year. The progress of our teams exemplifies the AFC's commitment to develop world-class competitions for our players, teams and fans.

We must applaud our Member Associations as well for supporting these competitions so wonderfully.

The AFC Futsal Club Championship Thailand 2016 will showcase some of the continent's most captivating, high-intensity matches as Asia's top twelve clubs battle for the title in Bangkok. The futsal fever continues with the FIFA Futsal World Cup Colombia 2016 in September with two out of five teams – Uzbekistan and Vietnam – representing Asia for the first time, joining Australia, Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand.

Our teams will also be looking to emulate Asia's previous outstanding performances at the Olympic Games when they compete in the Men's and Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016 in August. I wish all our teams much success and I am confident that they will do us proud on the global stage.

High-quality competitions together with strategic youth development form the cornerstones to a successful future for the game in Asia. In September, 16 nations will compete for the AFC U-16 Championship in Goa, India, with the top four ranked teams qualifying for the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017. The AFC U-19 Championship Bahrain 2016 also promises to dazzle us in October, with the top four ranked teams flying the Asian flag at the FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017.

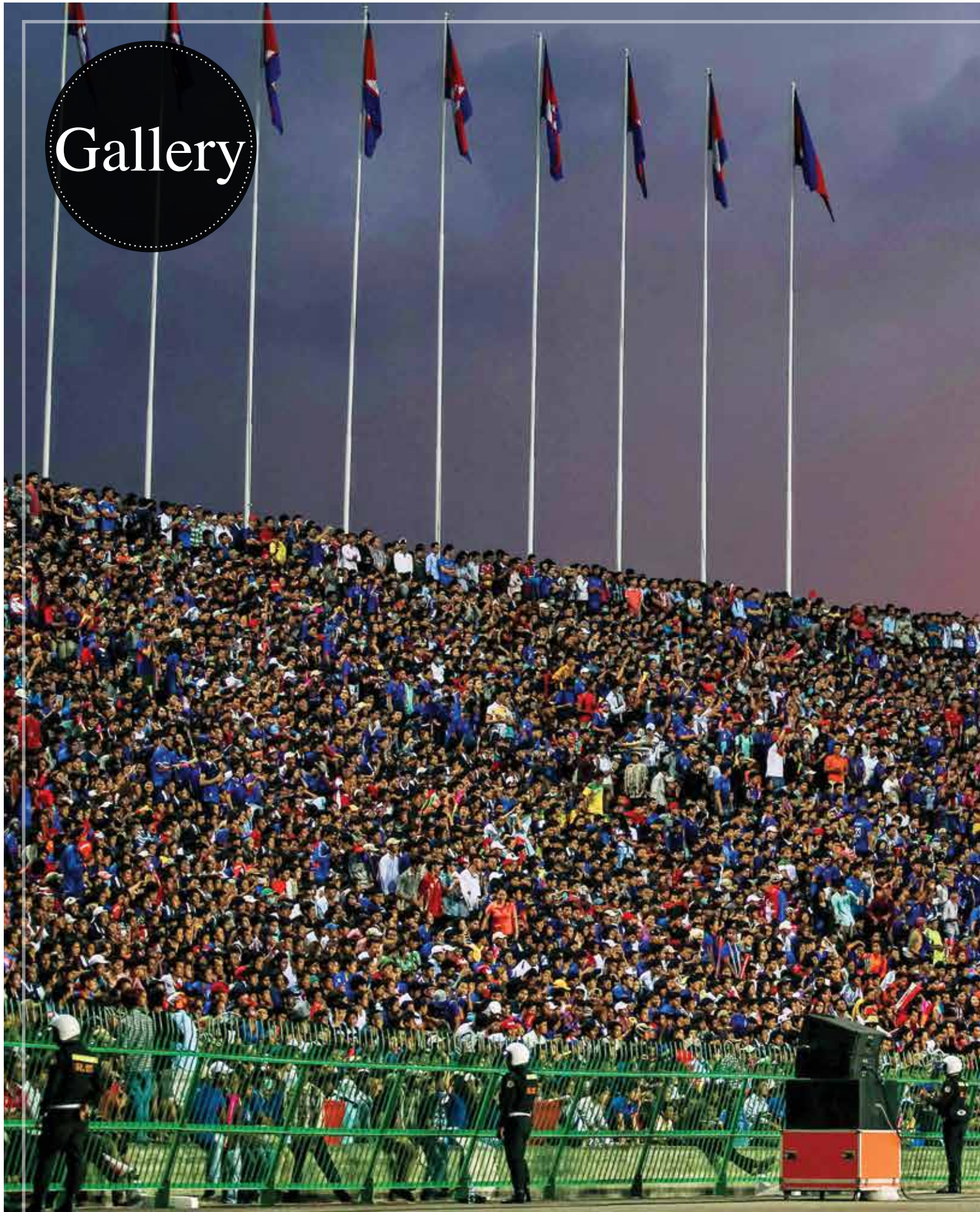
From elite-level competitions to the various programmes and activities for youth, coaches, officials and women's football, the AFC continues to strengthen the pillars for our Member Associations to succeed on the world stage. I am pleased to note that a record 37 Member Associations celebrated the AFC Grassroots Football Day this year.

With our new Vision and Mission, the future of Asian football is underpinned by integrity, unity, leadership and professionalism. I would like to thank all our Member Associations and valued stakeholders for their continued support.

Our journey ahead relies on our ability to stand united – One Asia, One Goal - as we strive to deliver a better future for tomorrow's generation. Together, I am confident we will strengthen the foundations for Asian football to reach new levels of excellence.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

Gallery

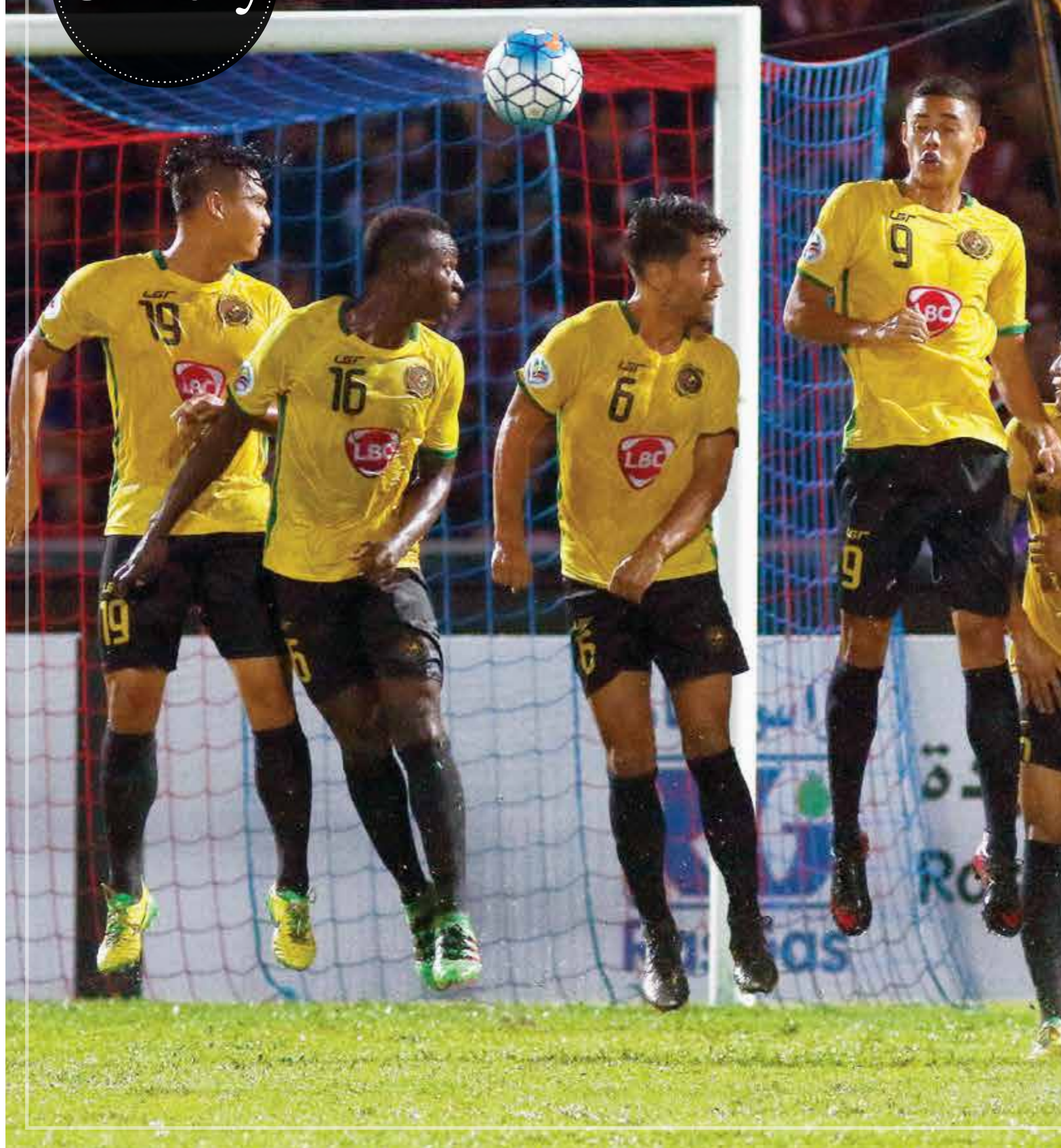




..... **Full House**

A sell-out crowd at Phnom Penh's National Olympic Stadium saw hosts Cambodia defeat Chinese Taipei 2-0 to complete a 4-2 win on aggregate in their AFC Asian Cup 2019 qualifying playoff in June.

Gallery





..... **On Target**

Johor Darul Ta'zim kept their AFC Cup defence on track as Juan Lucero's hat-trick helped the champions cruise into the quarter-finals after a comprehensive 7-2 defeat of tournament debutants Kaya FC in May's Round of 16.

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TOY





..... **Safe Hands**

FC Seoul goalkeeper Yu Sang-hun denies Urawa Red Diamond's Yoshiaki Komai from the spot as the K-League Classic club advanced to the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League 7-6 on penalties after the last 16 tie finished 3-3 on aggregate.



Former Winners Jeonbuk To Meet Shanghai SIPG

THE DRAW FOR THE QUARTER-FINALS OF THE 2016 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, WITH THE TIES SET TO TAKE PLACE IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, PITS THE 2006 WINNERS TAKE ON TOURNAMENT DEBUTANTS SHANGHAI SIPG.

Former winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors from Korea Republic will take on China's Shanghai SIPG in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League following June's draw in Kuala Lumpur.

Jeonbuk lifted the continental title 10 years ago after edging out Syrian side Al Karamah in the 2006 final 3-2 on aggregate having beaten compatriots Ulsan Hyundai in the semi-finals.

Under current coach Choi Kang-hee, the Jeonju-based club also reached the 2011 final but were defeated on penalties by Qatari side Al Sadd. Still smarting from that defeat, Choi is determined to lead Jeonbuk to Asian glory for a second time with their first obstacle a trip to China on August 23 before hosting the return fixture three weeks later.

Jeonbuk or Shanghai will face either 2013 runners-up FC Seoul from Korea Republic or China's Shandong Luneng, who return to the last eight for the first time since 2005.

In the West, inaugural winners Al Ain from the United Arab Emirates will face Uzbekistan club Lokomotiv. And Qatar's El Jaish will take on Al Nasr of the UAE.

The first legs of the quarter-finals will be played on August 23 and 24, with the return fixtures on September 13 and 14.

The semi-finals will also be played on a home-and-away basis, firstly on September 27 and 28, with the second legs then to be played on October 18 and 19.

The final will also take place over two legs, with the semi-final winner from the West hosting the second leg on November 26 having travelled to the East for the first leg a week earlier.

Quarter-Final Draw

	23/08/16 & 13/09/16 Shanghai SIPG v Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors	
	23/08/16 & 13/09/16 Al Ain vs Lokomotiv	
	24/08/16 & 14/09/16 FC Seoul vs Shandong Luneng	
	24/08/16 & 14/09/16 El Jaish vs Al Nasr	



Defending Champions To Face Familiar Foes

THE NEXT PHASE OF THE AFC CUP WILL TAKE PLACE IN SEPTEMBER WITH THE EIGHT QUALIFIERS ALL EYEING A PLACE IN NOVEMBER'S FINAL FOLLOWING JUNE'S DRAW IN KUALA LUMPUR.

Defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim will face Hong Kong's South China in the quarter-finals of the 2016 tournament following June's draw in Kuala Lumpur as the Malaysian side look to retain their title, bolstered by a 100% record so far in this year's campaign.

Johor edged out FC Istiklol of Tajikistan 1-0 in last year's final to end West Asia's dominance in the AFC Cup and become the first side from the East to lift the title.

Should they wish to repeat their success, though, they will have to negotiate a repeat of their last eight meeting with coach Mario Gomez's former club South China.

In the 2015 campaign, Johor were held to a 1-1 draw in the first leg with the Hong Kong

side before a 3-1 win at Mongkok Stadium in the return meeting saw them advance to the semi-finals where they progressed past 2014 champions Qadsia SC before their historic final victory over Istiklol in Dushanbe.

The winners will face either Indian champions JSW Bengaluru or Singapore's Tampines Rovers.

In the West, inaugural champions Al Jaish will take on Iraq's Air Force Club with either 2008 winners Al Muharraq of Bahrain or Lebanon's Al Ahed awaiting in the semi-finals.

The first legs of the quarter-finals will be played on September 13 and 14, with the return fixtures taking place a week later.

The semi-finals will also be played on a home-and-away basis with the first legs on September 27 and 28 and the return fixtures on October 18 and 19, with the final to be played as a one-off game on November 5.

Quarter-Final Draw			
	13/09/16 & 20/09/16 South China v Johor Darul Ta'zim		
	13/09/16 & 20/09/16 Air Force Club v Al Jaish		
	14/09/16 & 21/09/16 Al Ahed v Al Muharraq		
	14/09/16 & 21/09/16 JSW Bengaluru v Tampines Rovers		

INDIA EYE AFC U-16 SUCCESS ON HOME SOIL

Hosts India will look to qualify for the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup on merit despite being pooled in a tough AFC U-16 Championship Group A that includes Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates following May's draw for the continental youth finals in September.

Defending champions DPR Korea are placed alongside Uzbekistan, Thailand and Yemen, while the previous edition's runners-up, Korea Republic, are drawn to face Malaysia, Oman and Iraq in Group C.

Australia, Japan, Vietnam and Kyrgyzstan make up Group B to complete the line-up for the 17th edition of the AFC U-16 Championship.

The top four ranked teams of this year's AFC U-16 Championship will qualify for the FIFA U-17 World Cup in India in 2017.

In the event that India finish among the top four teams, three play-off matches will be organised among the four losing teams of the quarter-finals to determine the fifth placed team that will qualify for

India 2017.

With hosting rights guaranteeing India a place at the 17th edition of the AFC U-16 Championship, the young Blue Tigers still earned their ticket via the qualifiers by finishing runners-up in Group E. Coach Nicolai Adam is adamant that his team can repeat the feat for the World Cup finals, with a top-four finish in September's Asian competition ensuring a berth at the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup.

"Our goal stays the same – qualifying for the U-17 World Cup on merit. We will be ready and fit for the championship," the 43-year-old

German said.

"This is us plus the five other top teams in Asia. I don't know how many times I have met Iran as opponents and they are there again in our group.

"I don't have any idea about Saudi Arabia and UAE. I will try to gather as much information as we can about them and then sit down to analyse them and find out the solution to beat them."



Group A	India • Iran • Saudi Arabia • UAE
Group B	Australia • Japan • Vietnam • Kyrgyzstan
Group C	Korea Republic • Malaysia • Oman • Iraq
Group D	DPR Korea • Uzbekistan • Thailand • Yemen

Tough Draw For U-19 Hosts

Hosts Bahrain have been drawn in a strong Group A alongside 12-time winners Korea Republic and a pair of two-time champions in Saudi Arabia and Thailand at the AFC U-19 Championship in Bahrain in October.

Defending champions Qatar will face Japan, Yemen and Iran in Group C, with 2014 runners-up DPR Korea joined in Group B by the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Vietnam. And Group D will comprise of 2014 runners-up Uzbekistan, China, Australia and Tajikistan.

"Bahrain have a tough group, indeed all the groups are far from easy but I would say we certainly have one of the hardest groups to contend with," said the President of the Bahrain Football Association, His Excellency Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa.

"I certainly hope that Bahrain get a positive result at the U-19 Championship as that would undoubtedly help us going forward."

"We are looking forward to hosting the AFC U-19 Championship in Bahrain and we will endeavor to make it one of the best ever," Shaikh Ali added.

"As the host nation we will have two paths, one will be preparing the team and the other will be preparing the event and we will be focusing on both objectives at the same time.

"Historically this is the biggest football tournament Bahrain has

ever organised. We pitched for this tournament in order to put the spotlight on Bahrain, particularly the football side of things. Hopefully, by doing that we will organise an Asian class event and build a team of local talent who will help us organise many other football tournaments in the future."

The 16-nation competition will be staged at Manama's Bahrain National Stadium and Khalifa Sports City Stadium, with the top four finishers qualifying for the 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup in Korea Republic.

If Korea Republic finish among the Championship's top four teams, three play-off matches will be organised among the four losing teams of the quarter-finals to determine

the fifth placed team that will qualify for Korea Republic 2017.

"The Bahrain team participating at the AFC U-19 Championship will be the future national team given the fact that we are preparing this team for the FIFA

World Cup in Qatar in 2022," said Shaikh Ali.

"We have a long way to go and this U-19 tournament will be one of the key moments in the four-year development plan we have put in place. I think participating in such events will build a Bahrain national side that can handle itself at future competitions."



Group A	Bahrain • Thailand • Korea Republic • Saudi Arabia
Group B	DPR Korea • UAE • Iraq • Vietnam
Group C	Qatar • Japan • Yemen • Iran
Group D	Uzbekistan • China • Australia • Tajikistan



AFC Grassroots Football Day Sets New Record

AFC MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS MARKED THE FOURTH AFC GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL DAY ON MAY 15 WITH A TOTAL OF 37 COUNTRIES HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT WITH VARIOUS EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES.

The fourth AFC Grassroots Football Day took place in May with a record-breaking 37 Member Associations celebrating the Asian Football Confederation Grassroots Football Day on Sunday, May 15, setting a new benchmark up from the 31 who participated last year.

In total more than 60,000 football enthusiasts of all ages and abilities from across the continent participated in grassroots activities organised by Member Associations, an increase of more than 60% from 2015. The new record indicates the significant strides and growth of grassroots football in recent years: the inaugural AFC Grassroots Football Day in 2013 was celebrated in 13 Member Associations.

AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim

Al Khalifa said: "Grassroots football represents the foundation and basis for the game to thrive and flourish. The annual AFC Grassroots Day was initiated to drive and strengthen the foundations of the game and I am heartened to note the impressive progress made by our Member Associations since 2013."

"I would like to thank all of our MAs and stakeholders for working tirelessly to organise these vital opportunities and programmes for players of all ages to discover the joys of football."

In India, grassroots football festivals in more than 100 districts in India were organised by the All Indian Football Federation, reaching out to more than 10,000 participants nationwide.

A total of 200 boys and girls from various primary schools took part in a festival in the

northern province of Xayaboury as Laos also marked AFC Grassroots Football Day (pictured above).

In Iran, 800 coaches attended the country's first-ever National Grassroots Conference while nine grassroots festivals were held throughout the nation attended by close to 2,000 participants.

The Football Federation of Kyrgyz Republic celebrated AFC Grassroots Football Day with 500 children in two festivals in Bishkek conducted under the supervision of FFKR instructors and players from the under-16 football academy.

Oman marked their first-ever AFC Grassroots Football Day celebration at the Seeb Stadium with close to 100 children from the nine to 13 age groups involved in activities organised by the Oman Football Association (OFA).

NATIONAL TREASURE

HAVING BEEN DUBBED “CHINA’S MARADONA” AND REPORTEDLY BEEN SCOUTED BY EUROPE’S TOP CLUBS, RIGHT NOW WU LEI IS CHINA’S HOTTEST FOOTBALLING PROPERTY. AFTER HIS HEROICS FOR CLUB SIDE SHANGHAI SIPG AND THE CHINESE NATIONAL TEAM, HE PREDICTS A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR THE STATE OF THE GAME IN CHINA.

By: Andy Strong Photos: Lagardère Sports

In modern times, thanks in varying degrees to the rise of the media-fueled hype machine and the prevalence of glossily packaged online highlight compilation videos, hearing the words “the next Maradona” more often than not prompts little more than a knowing smirk and rather short shrift.

While some talents who have such titles bestowed upon them disappear into obscurity just as quickly as they emerged from it, others are fortunate enough to be blessed with the combination of ability, work ethic, and crucially, a coach patient but challenging enough to nurture that raw ability into something greater. For China and Shanghai SIPG’s Wu Lei, this is a familiar story.

Having burst on to the continental football scene in the 2004 AFC U-14 Festival of Football racking up six goals

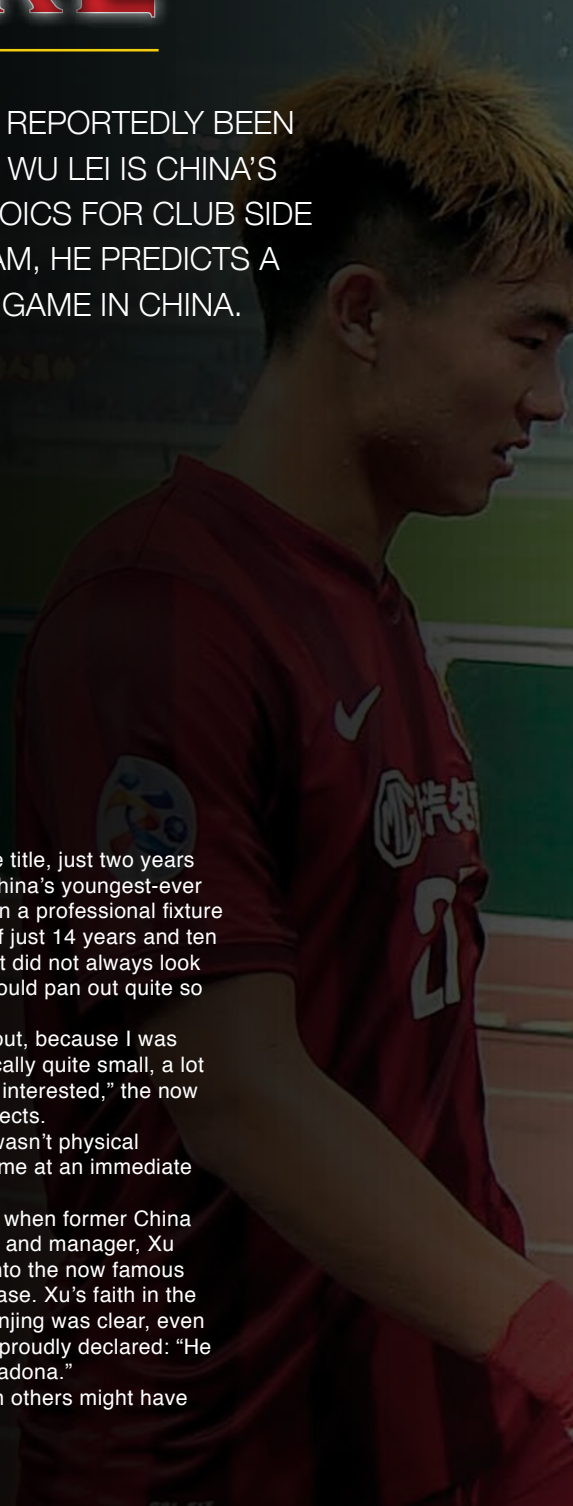
to help China to the title, just two years later, he became China’s youngest-ever player to compete in a professional fixture at the tender age of just 14 years and ten months. However, it did not always look as though things would pan out quite so well.

“When I started out, because I was so short and physically quite small, a lot of coaches weren’t interested,” the now 24-year-old Wu reflects.

“They thought I wasn’t physical enough, which put me at an immediate disadvantage.”

That all changed when former China international player and manager, Xu Genbao took him into the now famous Genbao Football Base. Xu’s faith in the young boy from Nanjing was clear, even then, as the coach proudly declared: “He will be China’s Maradona.”

“Back then, when others might have







found faults with my game, he always believed in me." Wu recalls fondly, "He gave me my opportunity, so of course I am really thankful to him."

That gratitude is shared by a great many more - both players and fans alike - as were it not for Xu's vision to create a 'Manchester United of China', Wu's current club would never have existed in the first place.

Having established the Genbao Football Base back in May 2000, Xu initially had no desires to launch a professional club. However, as the years progressed and his talented group of players developed, the lack of competitive youth football in China forced the owner's hand.

In 2005, Shanghai East Asia Football Club was founded, and within the space of just 8 years, his side were competing at the very top end of the Chinese football ladder, spearheaded, in no small part by their rising star, Wu.

Following the purchase of the club by Shanghai International Port Group back in late 2014, Xu departed the club, leading to wholesale changes in the setup Wu had been an integral part of since the age of 13.

One of the first moves by the new owners was to bring in former England, and then-Guangzhou R&F head coach, Sven-Goran Eriksson.

"There were definitely big changes; not

least in the structure of the club," says Wu.

"The new owners have enabled us to have even bigger dreams. Everything from the foreign players, the coaches and backroom staff has completely changed, so

"WHEN I STARTED OUT, BECAUSE I WAS SO SHORT AND PHYSICALLY QUITE SMALL, A LOT OF COACHES WEREN'T INTERESTED."

it's given the players an even better club environment.

"Xu Genbao is very strict, whereas Eriksson is a real gentleman. Most of the time he is calm; he doesn't lose his temper. Regardless of what situation we find ourselves in, he gives us a very calm working environment to work in."

While undoubtedly the star of the group of youngsters learning their craft at the Genbao Football Base, Wu found himself honing his skills alongside current teammates Wang Jiajie, Lu Wenjun, Yan Junling, Wang Shenchao and Cai Huikang.

"It has a lot of advantages. Because we've played together for so many years, whether it's on the pitch or off it, we all know and understand each other," says Wu.

"Playing together now feels comfortable, we have a firm knowledge of what each other can and will do on the field."

Such familiarity is also mirrored in the national camp; as no less than five SIPG players made it into the last China squad for the recent friendlies against Trinidad and Tobago and Kazakhstan. Add in fellow Genbao Base graduates and regular call ups, Zhang Linpeng and Jiang Zhipeng - now both playing their trades on opposite sides of Guangzhou - and that familiarity becomes even more pronounced.

Whereas familiarity amongst the playing staff is one thing, the man in charge of the national team is also someone whom Wu is more than comfortable playing under. The return to the national setup of coach Gao Hongbo - who gave Wu his international debut back in 2010, before then managing him at club level during the club's first year in the Chinese Super League back in 2013 - has coincided with an upturn in fortunes.

Having played out a frustrating 0-0 draw in Hong Kong back in November 2015, previous coach, Alain Perrin departed, leaving Gao to take charge for what many believed to be two dead-



rubber fixtures against the Maldives and Qatar. Nonetheless, after a convincing 4-0 win in their clash against the Maldives, belief amongst the China squad came surging back.

Going into their final fixture against an already-qualified Qatar, China needed a win to have any chance of making it into the final stages of qualification as one of the best placed group runners up, whilst also hoping results went their way elsewhere across the continent. While Huang Bowen put China in front on the hour, it was Wu's late strike which sealed the victory, and the player believes that the renewed togetherness and drive of the squad - thanks in no small part to Gao's influence - certainly played its part in the team's performances on the pitch.

"I think it's definitely more united now," says Wu. "Our aims, our confidence in ourselves is totally shared. We are all desperate to make it to the 2018 World Cup."

China face off against neighbours Korea Republic later this year in the first game of their World Cup Qualification group, and while qualification from a group containing traditional Asian footballing powerhouses Korea Republic and Iran, as well as an impressive young Qatar side will not be easy for China, the man who helped seal their place in the final group stage believes that at this stage, they can go toe to toe with any of

Top Left & Far Top Left
2010 AFC U-19 Championship

Left & Above 2016
AFC Champions League

"ERIKSSON IS A REAL GENTLEMAN. MOST OF THE TIME HE IS CALM; HE DOESN'T LOSE HIS TEMPER."

Asia's supposed bigger footballing nations.

"I think that when you enter this point in qualification, no team is clearly stronger than another; any team that makes it this far must be strong," says Wu.

"As far as we are concerned, whether we play home or away, we believe we can win. At this stage in the competition, every game is equally difficult."

The same can certainly be said of the latter stages of the Champions League. Whereas SIPG's 2016 domestic campaign has been a somewhat stop-start affair, their exploits in Asia have been thrilling to watch as the club's first appearance in the competition has continued to turn heads and make headlines.

SIPG tasted defeat in their opening group fixture - an encouraging, if ultimately disappointing tie in Melbourne against a Victory side well-versed in the demands of the Champions League. Despite the disappointing result, SIPG's performance in

that game in Melbourne gave fans, and to an even greater extent, the squad, hope that the side could compete at this level.

"Although we lost, I think we were still the better side. So even though we didn't win, we still gained a lot of confidence from that game," Wu contends.

"We lost the first game but then won the next two home games, which helped us to understand the nature of the competition and believe that we belonged there. The whole experience definitely helped us."

They didn't stop there either, as the side extended their winning run in the group to four games, securing qualification to the last 16 with a game to spare. When the draw pitted SIPG against FC Tokyo in the next round, many predicted this would be where the club's Champions League campaign ended.

Despite suffering a 2-1 defeat in the first leg in Tokyo, Wu's second-half goal gave his side the all-important away goal heading into the second leg.

"Actually I think in the first game maybe we were a little underprepared; we didn't know what to expect from Tokyo. But although the result in that first leg was disappointing, when we came back to Shanghai, we were still confident we would win the tie."

Confident they may have been, but as





the clock wound down on that second leg at Shanghai Stadium, confidence in the stand was steadily dwindling, as despite their dominance, SIPG could not find the breakthrough they so desperately needed.

But with just minutes to spare, Wu found himself in the right place at the right time to prod home after FC Tokyo goalkeeper Yota Akimoto could only parry a driven Elkeson effort into the SIPG winger's path. Cue scenes of febrile jubilation both on the pitch and in the stands, as referee Mohanad Saray called time on the match.

"We were so excited. I think progressing to the next round [particularly following the surprise group stage elimination of both Guangzhou Evergrande and Jiangsu Suning] was a great result for Chinese football," says Wu.

"After the game, you could see from our reactions on the pitch what it meant. In the changing rooms afterwards, everybody was singing and dancing, it was crazy."

His side will face off against Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors when the competition resumes in August, and following their exploits in the tournament thus far, Wu believes there is no reason not to think big.

"Because this year is our first time in the AFC Champions League, at first we just wanted to give a good performance. After that game against FC Tokyo our focus then

*Left 2018 FIFA
World Cup Qualifying*

*Above 2015 AFC
Asian Cup*

**"IN THE CHANGING ROOMS
AFTERWARDS, EVERYBODY
WAS SINGING AND DANCING,
IT WAS CRAZY."**

turned to just how far we can go."

Asked to choose a favourite between the two late goals scored for club and country, Wu pauses momentarily, before deciding.

"I think the goal for the national team was maybe slightly more important. To help my country make it into the final qualification group, particularly after so many years without this opportunity, I think this was the most crucial."

While China attempts to make it to the World Cup for only the second time in their history, their star man believes regardless of whether or not qualification is secured, the future of the game in China is bright.

"I think compared to previously, things are much better now. Particularly the environment - many young children are choosing to play football and are learning fast. I think things are definitely getting better and better," says Wu.

"If we can sustain these ideas and

execute them properly, I think one day we will definitely reach the level of established Asian footballing nations like Korea Republic and Japan."

"I think the biggest problem is that the number of serious competitive fixtures is rather low. If we can play regularly in bigger fixtures, this will help us a great deal, as the experience of friendlies and competitive fixtures is totally different."

Undoubtedly however, much of his team's fortunes rely on his prodigious ability and goalscoring capabilities - something which brings with it an intense level of scrutiny and pressure.

"There is definitely pressure, because everybody's expectations become greater and greater. Every time you don't play so well, the pressure increases, and that's been the same every year," says Wu.

"The most important thing is to be confident in yourself, not dwelling on things too much is very important.

"I still think I'm developing. Right now I think I'm just reaching a footballer's ideal age, hopefully I haven't peaked just yet."

As both the quarter finals of the Champions League and the final 2018 World Cup qualification group fixtures draw nearer, fans of both SIPG and China will be hoping just as much.



THIS IS OUR TIME

EIGHT SIDES REMAIN IN CONTENTION
TO BE NAMED 2016 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
WINNERS, BUT WHO WILL COME OUT
ON TOP AS THE TOURNAMENT
ENTERS THE QUARTER-FINAL STAGE?

With two former continental champions, a 2013 runners-up, a club looking for redemption and four last eight first-timers all in the mix to be crowned kings of Asian football, the 2016 AFC Champions League quarter-finals are eagerly anticipated.

Inaugural champions Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates remain in the hunt for a second Asian title and one that would see them come full circle after lifting the very first AFC Champions League trophy thirteen years ago.

Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai

Motors, though, also know what it's like to taste continental glory after their 2006 success, while countrymen FC Seoul will be desperate to heal their 2013 heartbreak when they fell at the final hurdle.

China's Shandong Luneng, meanwhile, have belied poor domestic form to reach the quarter-finals for the first time since 2005. The story is different for Shanghai SIPG who in recent years have enjoyed success in the Chinese Super League and have so far transferred that successfully to their debut continental campaign.

For Lokomotiv of Uzbekistan, the UAE's Al Nasr and El Jaish of Qatar, the quarter-final stage is similarly uncharted territory but their performances in the group stage and the Round of 16 show they will be a tough test for any opponent.







Al Ain



Lokomotiv



First Leg - 23/08/16 • 19:00



Former champions Al Ain stuttered throughout the early stages of the 2016 AFC Champions League as their forward line struggled to find the back of the net.

Back-to-back losses at the hands of El Jaish from Qatar in their first two games threatened to derail the club's continental campaign, but with Omar Abdulrahman in inspirational form Al Ain reestablished themselves.

The United Arab Emirates midfielder scored the only goal in his side's 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli on Matchday Three with a fine free kick and from there, the side were back to something like their usual form.

A brace from Douglas secured a win over Al Ahli in the return fixture with Zlatko Dalic's side then picking up four points against Nasaf.

Al Ain then saw off Zob Ahan over two legs in the Round of 16, but if Dalic's side are to threaten to reclaim the title the club won in 2003 there will be an need to improve in front of goal for a team that creates numerous opportunities but struggles to convert.



Top
Omar Abdulrahman

Above
Mohamed Abdulrahman



COACH Zlatko Dalic

Zlatko Dalic's future at Al Ain was under threat after a disappointing domestic season, but after a tumultuous summer within the club the 49-year-old Croatian recently extended his contract, making him the club's longest serving coach. He previously served as head coach with Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal and led Al Ain to the domestic title in 2015.

Second Leg - 13/09/16 • 20:00



Lokomotiv may be appearing in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League for the first time in the club's 14-year history, but the team from Tashkent boasts many familiar names in their starting line-up.

Two-time AFC Player of the Year Server Djeparov may be approaching the end of his stellar career, but he is joined by fellow Uzbekistan internationals Ignatij Nesterov and Timur Kapadze in featuring in the last eight of the competition once again.

The trio were part of the Pakhtakor and Bunyodkor teams that reached the latter phase of the AFC Champions League and they will be hoping to finally taste success as the clock runs down on their time on the pitch having yet to win a continental club title.

Lokomotiv created several upsets along the way to taking their place in the quarter-finals, seeing off former winners Al Ittihad and 2007 runners-up Sepahan to finish on top of their group before defeating former Asian champions Al Hilal in the Round of 16.



Top
Marat Bikmaev

Above
Server Djeparov



COACH Andrey Miklyaev

Former Uzbekistan defender Andrey Miklyaev made history by guiding Lokomotiv to the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League for the first time since the club's formation. The 48-year-old took charge of the team in January as the long-term replacement for Vadim Abramov, who had steered the club to successive runner-up finishes in the Uzbek league.



El Jaish



Al Nasr



First Leg – 24/08/16 • 19:00



El Jaish have long lived in the shadow of fellow Qatari clubs Al Sadd and Lekhwiya, but it was at the expense of one of their great rivals that the Doha club booked their place in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League for the first time.

Sabri Lamouchi's side handed Lekhwiya – quarter-finalists themselves in 2013 and last season – a 6-4 aggregate defeat in the Round of 16 to cap what had been an impressive run of results for El Jaish since the tournament kicked off in late February.

El Jaish had a flying start to the group stages, dealing out back-to-back defeats to former champions Al Ain in the first two Matchdays to signal their intent.

Key to the club's impressive performances have been strike duo Abderrazzaq Hamedallah, previously of China's Guangzhou R&F, and Brazil's Romarinho, with the pair scoring four times between them in group stages before bagging another three in the win over Lekhwiya.



Top
Romarinho

Above
Abderrazzaq Hamedallah



Second Leg – 14/09/16 • 19:00



Al Nasr will be making their first-ever appearance in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League after a run of form that proved the club from the United Arab Emirates should not be underestimated.

Having failed to progress beyond the group stages in their two previous appearances in the competition – in 2012 and 2013 – Al Nasr made a disappointing start to their 2016 campaign before back-to-back wins over Sepahan and Al Ittihad.

Those wins proved to be vital as El Jaish did not collect another victory during the group stages as a run of three draws in the final three matches moved Ivan Jovanovic's side into the Round of 16 for the first time.

Al Nasr made an immediate impact in the knockout phase, thumping Tractorsazi Tabriz of Iran 4-1 in the first leg to put one foot in the last eight, and even a 3-1 reversal in the second meeting between the teams was not enough to keep the club from making history.



Top
Jires Kembo Ekoko

Above
Khalid Jalal



COACH Sabri Lamouchi

French coach Sabri Lamouchi continued to enhance his reputation with impressive performances throughout the AFC Champions League with El Jaish having previously steered Cote D'Ivoire to the finals of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. A two-time French league winner as a player, Lamouchi also had a successful stint in Italy before finishing his playing career in Qatar.



COACH Ivan Jovanovic

Serbia's Ivan Jovanovic took over at Al Nasr in 2013 having impressed in Cyprus with APOEL Nicosia, who he took into the group stages of the UEFA Champions League for the first time in the club's history. The 54-year-old won four league titles while in Cyprus and was also named Serbian Coach of the Year in 2011.



Shanghai SIPG



Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors



First Leg - 23/08/16 • 19:00

Second Leg - 13/09/16 • 20:00



Chinese Super League runners-up Shanghai SIPG made their AFC Champions League debut after running Guangzhou Evergrande close in the 2015 Chinese championship, a placing achieved under the management of coach Sven Goran Eriksson.

Under the former England manager, the club has impressed in their maiden continental campaign and topped a Group G that featured former Asian champions Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Gamba Osaka, as well as then A-League winners Melbourne Victory.

Shanghai were then drawn against FC Tokyo in the Round of 16 and defeated the Japanese side on away goals thanks to Wu Lei's injury-time strike.

China forward Wu, who is tied in second place in the competition's leading scorer chart with five goals, is part of a formidable attack that includes former AFC Champions League winners Elkeson and Dario Conca and big money summer signing Hulk.



Top
Elkeson

Above
Wu Lei



COACH Sven Goran Eriksson

Famous for his time in Italy and England, Sven Goran Eriksson has so far excelled in his first appearance in the AFC Champions League. The Swede has built on last season's domestic success, with Shanghai particularly impressive in the group stage of the AFC Champions League this season.



Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors' impressive run of appearances in the AFC Champions League continued with the club qualifying for the tournament for a seventh straight season, with Choi Kang-hee's side once again advancing to the knockout stage.

The two-time finalists – the club won the title in 2006 and were runners-up to Al Sadd in 2011 – went into the current edition of the continental championship as K-League Classic champions as they claimed their fourth title in seven years.

A 2-2 draw with China's Jiangsu FC in the final round of group matches ensured Jeonbuk joined FC Tokyo in qualifying from Group E before the Koreans saw off Melbourne Victory 3-2 on aggregate in the last 16.

Goal-scoring Brazilian midfielder Leonardo has been key to Jeonbuk's performances so far this year, while alongside him Korea Republic internationals Han Kyo-won, Lee Jae-sung and Kim Bo-kyung make up one of the most talented midfields in the last eight.



Top
Lee Dong-gook

Above
Lee Jae-sung



COACH Choi Kang-Hee

Choi Kang-hee knows what it takes to be successful at the continental level, having guided Jeonbuk to the AFC Champions League title in 2006 and to another final in 2011 before steering the Korea Republic national team through qualifying for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Since returning to the club in 2014, Choi has led Jeonbuk to lift back-to-back K-League titles.





FC Seoul



Shandong Luneng FC



First Leg - 24/08/16 • 19:00

Second Leg - 14/09/16 • 19:00



Former runners-up FC Seoul were among the most impressive sides in the group stage netting 17 goals as they won Group F, helped by the sensational form of Brazilian striker Adriano who scored 10 times.

While their defeat to Guangzhou Evergrande by the narrowest of margins in the 2013 AFC Champions League Final remains FC Seoul's best finish at the competition, Hwang Sun-hong's side have now reached the knockout stage in each of their six campaigns on the continent as well as appearing at the semi-finals in 2014.

Adriano's goals have hit the headlines but Dejan Damjanovic's return after a spell in China has been just as important with the Montenegrin forward slotting seamlessly back into the FC Seoul attack, a position which had never been adequately replaced in his absence.

Along with wing-back Go Yo-han, midfielders Ko Kwang-min, Kim Chi-woo and Yun Il-lok have played important roles in FC Seoul's continental consistency.



Top
Osmar Barba

Above
Ju Se-jeong



Having cruised past Indian club Mohun Bagan in the preliminary stage 2, Shandong Luneng's defeat of former runners-up Adelaide United in the play-offs saw them embark on their eighth AFC Champions League campaign. It has proved to be their most successful so far since 2005, and a timely distraction from a difficult domestic campaign.

Shandong last appeared in the quarter-finals 11 years ago and they do so again in this year's edition while struggling in the lower regions of the Chinese Super League table, a position that belies the side's talent.

China's number one custodian is also Shandong's, and Wang Dalei regularly performs athletic feats between the posts and boasts good command of his penalty area, while Argentine playmaker Walter Montillo remains the creative hub.

Shandong is also known for developing young Chinese talent with Liu Binbin, Wang Tong and Jin Jingdao among the rising stars at the Jinan club.



Top
Diego Tardelli

Above
Wu Xinghan



COACH Hwang Sun-hong

A former winner of Asia's top club competition in his playing days with Pohang Steelers, Hwang Sun-hong was appointed coach of FC Seoul in the summer following the departure of Choi Yong-soo. Hwang was previously at the helm of Busan I-Park and Pohang, winning the K-League and Korean FA Cup twice with the latter.



COACH Felix Magath

A three-time Bundesliga winner with Bayern Munich and Wolfsburg, German coach Felix Magath began his first role in Asia when he was appointed by Shandong in June as a replacement for former Brazil coach Mano Menezes. Magath also coached at Fulham in the English Premier League as well as various other clubs in his native Germany.



AFC
CUP

AFC CUP HUNT HEATS UP

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM WILL LOOK TO WIN BACK-TO-BACK AFC CUP TITLES AND MARK THEIR RISE TO THE ASIAN ELITE. WILL THE SOUTHERN TIGERS CONTINUE TO ROAR OR WILL A NEW AFC CUP KING BE CROWNED? AFC QUARTERLY LOOKS AT THE EIGHT WHO HAVE REACHED THE QUARTER-FINALS.

With one dynasty ended, another looks to have risen. Since its inception in 2004, teams from West Asia have dominated the AFC Cup. Ten of the 11 champions from 2004 to 2014 were from the Gulf region with Uzbekistan's Nasaf the one anomaly after they secured the 2011 title.

The teams from the East Asia Zone were unable to break the stranglehold. Until last year, when Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim ended the East Asian slump by defeating Tajikistan's FC Istiklol in the 2015 AFC Cup final.

And the Southern Tigers hunger for glory

is yet to be sated as they are on course to defend their title this year on the back of a 100% record so far in the 2016 edition.

Also in the mix are inaugural champions Al Jaish of Syria, while 2008 winners Al Muharraq could prove Johor's biggest threat from the West with the 2008 winners from Bahrain boasting the tournament's only other unbeaten record.

And with Air Force Club boasting the tournament's leading scorer Hammadi Ahmad, clubs would be wise not to discount the Iraqi side.

From the East, Hong Kong's South China boast a 100% AFC Cup record since coach Ricardo Rambo took over with India's JSW Bengaluru likewise looking to make a mark in their first appearance in the quarter-finals.







Air Force Club



Al Jaish



First Leg - 13/09/16

With Hammadi Ahmad leading the attacking line, Air Force Club have been one of the revelations of the 2016 AFC Cup so far as the Iraqi side brushed aside all comers on their way to the last eight.

Ahmad's 12 goals in seven games make him the tournament's leading scorer so far with the Iraq international netting at least a goal in every game played in the 2016 competition.

Air Force Club lost just once in the group stages – a surprise 5-2 reversal against Syria's Al Wahda – but still comfortably topped Group C before seeing off Jordan's Al Wehdat in the Round of 16.

With question marks over the future of several key players, the make up of the Air Force Club side will determine their chances in



the next phase of the competition.

However, Air Force Club contain an impressive combination of experience and youth to go into their meeting with Al Jaish as favourites to reach the semi-finals for the first time in the club's history.



Second Leg - 20/09/16

Al Jaish have advanced to the last eight of the 2016 AFC Cup despite a slow start to the campaign that saw the Syrian army side progress as runners-up from group D behind Bahrain's Muharraq.

Ahmad Al Shaar's side only won half of their matches in a group that also featured Oman's Fanja and Palestine's Ahli Al Khalil before making it through to the quarter-finals with a 1-0 win over Iraq's Naft Al Wasat in the Round of 16.

Despite winning the AFC Cup back in 2004 Al Jaish have only appeared in the competition four times in the intervening years, but this year marks the second season in a row that the club has qualified for the knockout rounds.

Midfielder Mohammad Hamadko scored the only goal as Al Jaish

saw off Naft Al Wasat in the Round of 16 but while there are few star names amongst the squad and the Syrians will be forced to play their home tie at a neutral venue due to the security situation at home, their team spirit and togetherness mean they should not be written off.



South China



Johor Darul Ta'zim



First Leg - 13/09/16

Hong Kong's South China will look to secure a second appearance in the semi-finals of the AFC Cup under Brazilian coach Ricardo Rambo after reaching the final four for the first time in 2009.

Rambo is in his fourth term with the team and the former South China player will seek to extend the side's 100% record in the 2016 edition of the tournament since he took over ahead of Matchday Four.

Under predecessor Casemiro Mior, South China had lost three games in a row and looked a doubt for the Round of 16. But, following his countryman's dismissal, Rambo's appointment proved a catalyst for the club as they went on to win their next three AFC Cup ties to finish in the runner-up spot in Group G.



The renaissance would continue into the knockout stage as an extra-time goal from Brazilian forward Luiz Carlos proved enough to edge the Hong Kong side past Ceres La Salle and into the quarter-finals for second consecutive tournament.



Second Leg - 20/09/16

Defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim have been in ominous form so far in their campaign to retain their AFC Cup title with a 100% record in the group stage that was followed up by a 7-2 demolition of Filipino club Kaya FC in the Round of 16.

Having won last year's competition in only their second appearance and thereby becoming the first club from the East Asia zone to do so, Johor have proved to be a rising force in continental football.

Under the guidance of Argentine coach Mario Gomez, who also led Johor to the Malaysia Super League title last year, and backed by Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, the Southern Tigers are ready to roar again.

Captain for both club and country Malaysia midfielder Safiq Rahim remains Johor's jewel. The 29-year-old was named MVP of last



year's AFC Cup and he has shown no signs of slowing down in the 2016 edition as he leads his side's scorers with seven goals. Safiq's partner-in-crime Safee Sali is another significant threat while Gomez will also look to his compatriots Pereyra Diaz and Juan Lucero to spearhead his attack.





Al Ahli



Al Muharraq



First Leg - 14/09/16

Al Ahli go into the quarter-finals of the AFC Cup for the first time since 2005 having bounced back from an opening day loss to top their group before seeing off Syria's Al Wahda in the Round of 16.

The Lebanese side slipped up against Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr on Matchday One only to put together a run of four straight wins in a group that also featured Al Wehdat of Jordan and Bahrain's Al Hidd to secure their place in the knockout phase with one game remaining.

Senegal striker Mouhamadou Drame scored the goals that sparked Al Ahli's success in the earlier stages of the competition, with two of his six goals coming in the win over Al Wahda that took the club into the last eight.

Lebanon international Hassan Chaito - previously on the books of Malaysian side Terengganu - provides the thrust for Al Ahli in his role as an attacking midfielder in a squad that boasts a number of the country's players, including defender Nour Mansour as well as midfielders Haitham Faour and Abbas Ali Atwi.



Second Leg - 21/09/16

Bahrain's Al Muharraq breezed through the group stages of the 2016 AFC Cup, advancing to the knockout rounds of the competition with a record that saw them drop just two points over the six games in a commanding start to proceedings.

A draw on Matchday Five against Palestine's Ahli Al Khalil was the only blot on the team's record as Al Muharraq recorded an impressive five wins in a group that also featured Syria's Al Jaish and Fanja of Oman on their way to 1-0 win in the Round of 16 against Jordan's Al Faisaly.

Bahrain international striker Ismail Abdullatif carried much of the attacking threat for Al Muharraq alongside Admir Catovic, who had only joined the club at the turn of the year, with the Bosnian's strength and technical ability unlocking opposing defences.



The 33-time Bahraini champions won the AFC Cup crown in 2008 - the only club from Bahrain to do so - and the reigning King's Cup holders will be confident of advancing to the semi-finals against Lebanon's Al Ahli in this year's competition.



Jsw Bengaluru



Tampines Rovers



First Leg - 14/09/16

I-League winners Jsw Bengaluru secured their first-ever place in the quarter-finals of the AFC Cup having finished in second place behind defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim in Group H before edging out Hong Kong's Kitchee in the last 16.

After defeat to fellow quarter-finalists South China at the Round of 16 in last year's edition, India's Bengaluru have already gone a stage further in just their second appearance in the continental competition.

This year, Bengaluru sealed their place in the Round of 16 with a game to spare after a 2-1 victory against Lao Toyota in Matchday Five coupled with Myanmar's Ayeyawady United losing by the same scoreline to Johor in Yangon.

And despite their 3-0 defeat to the Malaysians in their final Group H tie, Bengaluru showed no little resolve in their next trip eastwards as they edged Kitchee 3-2 at Mongkok Stadium in the Round of 16 thanks to a brace from India captain Sunil Chhetri and the game's winner from teenager Daniel Lalhlipui.



Second Leg - 21/09/16

Singapore's Tampines Rovers are set to make their first quarter-final appearance in the AFC Cup since 2007 following three consecutive group stage exits in 2014, 2013 and 2012.

This year, successful progression from Group E in second place ahead of Malaysia's Selangor and Bangladesh champions Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club took V. Sundramoorthy's side into the Round of 16 for the first time in five years.

Tampines joined fellow ASEAN side and defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim in the last eight after winning their tie with India's Mohun Bagan 2-1 in extra-time.

Former Liverpool winger Jermaine Pennant takes the headlines and the marquee signing has proved a touch of class for Tampines, with his assist for Afiq Yunus' extra-time winner against Mohun Bagan among his most vital contributions in the tournament.



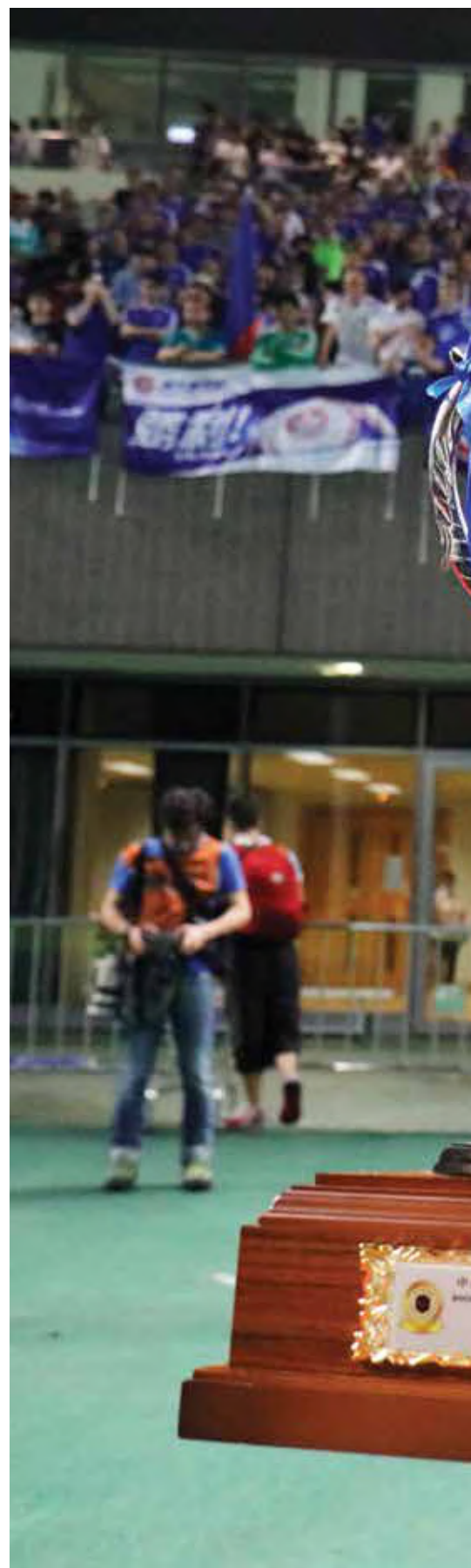
Pennant is joined in the ranks by no shortage of Singaporean talent, though, with national team goalkeeper Izwan Mahbud between the sticks, along with forward Fazrul Nawaz, midfielder Shadan Sulaiman and defender Hafiz Abu Sujad.



THE PIONEER

CHAN YUEN-TING MADE FOOTBALL HISTORY EARLIER THIS YEAR WHEN SHE BECAME THE FIRST FEMALE COACH TO WIN A MEN'S TOP-FLIGHT TITLE IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL. HAVING ALREADY SHATTERED ONE GLASS CEILING, THE HONG KONGER IS LOOKING FOR EVEN GREATER ACHIEVEMENTS TO COME.

By: Daniel Pordes **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Eastern Sports Club







U nassuming from the outside, the clubhouse of King's Park Sports Ground in Ho Man Tin, Hong Kong, might seem an unlikely place to encounter a Guinness Book of World Records holder, but, inside, the trophy-laden cabinet that provides the backdrop for the interview with Eastern coach Chan Yuen-ting is highly appropriate.

While the silver cups and shields that loom over the 27-year-old from Sha Tin district may belong to the various rugby teams who are the regular occupants of King's Park, they can't help but evoke the memories of April 22 when Chan became the first woman to win a top-flight title in men's professional football.

In front of a sold-out Tseung Kwan O Sports Ground, Chan and Eastern ended a 21-year wait for a Hong Kong championship with a 2-1 win over South China, and with it came the headlines and the world recognition for the young coach who had accomplished what no woman had before in the male-dominated sport.

"A lot of reporters and press contacted me about the achievement and I was just really surprised by the attention," admits

Chan, enjoying the air conditioning following an hour's training with her players in hot and humid conditions on one of the three artificial pitches at King's Park.

"When I became Eastern's head coach, I didn't think about becoming a pioneer or a role model for women's football, about being a female coach and coaching a men's team, or even winning the league title. I just wanted to do my job well.

"No one would have thought this could happen in Hong Kong, I'm just really lucky."

A mixture of luck and talent, as anyone who follows sports will know, is the perfect recipe for success but, in Chan's case, it was a bit of opportune forgery back in her teenage years that proved the catalyst for her career.

"I have loved football ever since I was young and always wanted to play but my family didn't allow me to because society says women shouldn't play; they should go and dance or draw something," she recalls.

"But when I was around 15 years old, I read about a football summer programme. I got the application form, and then signed my mother's name [in the parental consent section]."

An amused grin lights up Chan's face.

"That whole summer my mother would wonder why I left the apartment in the morning and come back dirty later on each day."

After eventually confessing to her parents,

Chan was allowed to continue for the summer with the proviso that education was a priority, culminating eventually with a place at Chinese University of Hong Kong where she studied her BA in Geography.

University life didn't replace the football itch, though, and while coaching part-time to make extra money helped, an offer to join top flight side TSW Pegasus working in data analysis proved a temptation too strong, despite renewed parental disapproval.

"My parents completely rejected the idea," says Chan. "My mother never imagined I would join football again after graduating university, and my father was very angry.

"It was a low salary, a part-time job, but I really wanted to try because I believe if you can do something you love, you're very lucky. And when you're young you always want to do something a bit crazy.

"I asked my father to let me try for one year and he eventually agreed. And then after that year, I asked him again for another year. He turned me down and asked me to look for a stable job with a better salary and long-term development.

"But I didn't accept this answer, so I just kept going."

Chan's education kept going as well, but it was in football, to her parents' chagrin, that her studies focused. Her AFC 'C' Licence



was followed up by enrolment in the AFC's 2008 Project Future Coaches programme from which she graduated two years later with her 'B' Licence.

Assistant coaching roles at Southern District and then the newly re-named Sun Pegasus followed before Chan joined Eastern last July, having also completed the AFC's advanced Women's 'A' Coaching Certificate Course.

The 'A' Licence proved to be crucial. Five months into her stint at Eastern, coach Yeung Ching-kwong left the club to join China League One side Meizhou Hakka and Chan, by virtue of her coaching certification, was deemed the most suitable to take over.

"The club wanted to make an official announcement so I couldn't say anything, not even to friends and family before the press conference – they were very surprised," says Chan of the formal appointment in December.

"Even the players were confused as they found out the same time as the press!

"The players knew it was a difficult situation for me as well and offered words of support that helped me. I appreciated their reaction a lot."

Chan had little time to bed into her new role with games coming thick and fast but she was soon lifting her first silverware as Eastern coach after a 2-0 win over former club

Far Left Receiving Guinness World Record award

Top Left and Above Celebrating 2015/2016 Hong Kong Premier League Title

Southern in the Senior Shield final in January.

"Winning the Senior Shield was really important, when I took over it was our first target. I was really nervous in the final but all the players and staff helped me a lot," admits Chan.

"I remember when the game finished, I still didn't look that happy but it was because I couldn't believe we had won. But from then on, I began to gain confidence.

"At the beginning of my time in charge, our tactics followed the style of the former coach as it was a good style and we were in the middle of the season.

"But as the fixtures went on and we remained at the top of the table, we found that teams would defend deep against us so we had to work on new ways to break down compact defences.

"The most important part for me, though, was to ensure good communication with my players. Men and women are different; we have a different way of approaching issues and thinking. I also don't have the experience of being a professional player. So I had to understand why my players have a certain

type of thinking or emotional reaction.

"Some coaches don't like to listen to the players as they have their own methods, but for me it is important to be very patient and learn from them, they gave me a lot of good opinions."

Having won over her players and fellow coaches with her approach to the game and Hong Kong's fans and the world's media alike with her success on the field, Chan is hoping that her success can now pave the way for further developments for women in the sport.

"I have had some discussions with the HKFA and women coaches and these last few years they have already done a lot. When I was young there was no system in place, but now there are a lot of programmes including youth developments and we can see a lot of improvement already," she says.

"However, of course, Hong Kong football is not at the same level as countries like Korea Republic or Japan. I really appreciate women's football development in Japan, their team is really great and we can learn a lot of things from them – I'd like to go there to learn more, and bring what I learn back to Hong Kong football.

Before that, though, Chan may experience continental football as coach of the Hong Kong league champions with Eastern's title



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At the heart of the image



*Above 2015/2016 Senior
Shield Title*



win presenting an opportunity to take on some of Asia's best in the 2017 season. A new challenge that could mark yet another new milestone: the first woman coach to lead a men's team in an AFC competition. In the future, this might not be such a rare occurrence.

"I have a lot of friends who studied with me on the AFC courses, and more who are still playing and coaching in Hong Kong, they all want to become a full-time coach or do more in football," says Chan.

"They sent me messages to congratulate me on the league championship and they also told me they are happy because they see that I made history and that has given them the confidence to keep going.

"I tell them I am just very lucky, but that if they really love football they have to chase their dream, even if they don't achieve the ultimate goal, they still will enjoy their life."

Chan's parents finally seem convinced, too.

"My mum never mentioned me signing her name again, so I think she forgot. Or maybe she's just proud of me. I think they're both happy that I have made some achievement in my life."



PRIDE OF ASIA

JAPAN, KOREA REPUBLIC,
IRAQ, CHINA AND AUSTRALIA
TRAVEL TO BRAZIL TO
REPRESENT ASIA AT THE SUMMER
OLYMPICS LOOKING TO FOLLOW
IN THE MEDAL-WINNING
FOOTSTEPS OF JAPAN IN 1968
AND 2012, CHINA IN 1996 AND
KOREA REPUBLIC IN 2012

The 2014 FIFA World Cup may still be fresh in the memory, but Asia's footballing representatives in the form of Japan, Korea Republic and Iraq's mens teams and China and Australia's women will be looking for far different results when they return to Brazil for the Summer Olympic Games in August.

And they will be returning with genuine expectation of success, not just hope.

For Asia's men and women have enjoyed a long and successful relationship with the football tournament at the Olympiad dating back to Mexico City in 1968 right up to the most recent Olympic Games in London four years ago.

In Central America, over four decades ago, Kunishige Kamamoto famously scored twice in the third place play-off against hosts Mexico to secure Japan's – and Asia's – first Olympic medal in football and earn a place in Asian football's

pantheon of greats.

And Park Chu-young and Koo Ja-cheol added their names to that list after scoring against Japan at the same stage in London as Korea Republic etched their names in the history of Asian football.

Before Japan's 1968 triumph, the closest the continent had come to securing a medal was in 1956, when India finished fourth in Melbourne after seeing off hosts Australia in the quarter-finals in a tournament that featured only 11 teams.

Japan then reached the knockout phase on home soil in 1964, but it was in Mexico City that Kamamoto and company excelled, with the forward finishing as the tournament's top scorer.

Despite the lack of medal-winning success for Asia's men, though, there have been a number of standout performances during the intervening years before 2012 in London.

Iran and DPR Korea both reached the quarter-finals in 1976, while Kuwait matched that feat in Moscow four years







later.

Japan famously handed a Brazil team tipped for the gold medal and which featured the talents of players such as future FIFA Player of the Year Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos a surprise 1-0 defeat at Miami's Orange Bowl in 1996.

However it was not enough to take Japan into the knockout phase of the competition as Akira Nishino's team ultimately missed out on goal difference behind the South Americans and a Nigeria side that would eventually go on to win the gold medal.

Four years later, it was Japan who went closest again but were denied in the quarter-finals when they were defeated by the United States.

It was Iraq who went closest to replicating Japan's 1968 success when, in 2004 in Athens, Adnan Hamad steered his team from the war-torn nation to the competition's semi-finals.

Iraq topped their group after finishing ahead of Costa Rica, Morocco and Portugal to qualify for the last eight alongside Korea Republic.

But while Korea Republic fell to Paraguay in the quarter-finals, Iraq saw off Australia to reach the last four and put themselves within striking distance of a medal.

A 3-1 loss in the last four against Paraguay ended Iraq's hopes of gold before they suffered a 1-0 defeat to Italy in the bronze medal match.

Hosts China, Australia, Japan and Korea Republic all failed to make an impact at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, with the quartet unable to progress to the quarter-finals.

But four years later in London, Japan and Korea Republic both made it through to the last eight while the United Arab Emirates drew huge plaudits on their debut appearance at the Olympic Games.

Korea Republic progressed from a group stage that contained eventual gold medal winners Mexico with an unbeaten record, while Japan finished clear of Honduras, Morocco and Spain.

And Japan continued that form in the quarterfinals as Kensuke Nagai, Maya Yoshida and Yuki Otsu scored to secure a 3-0 win over Egypt.

Korea, meanwhile, needed penalties to edge out hosts Great Britain after Ji Dong-won's opener was cancelled out by Aaron Ramsey and saw the sides draw 1-1 after extra-time.

But with Asia guaranteed a medal, the semi-finals proved one step too far for the continent's representatives as Japan lost 3-1 to Mexico and Korea Republic suffered a 3-1 defeat to Brazil.

And it was Korea Republic who were able to pick themselves up as Park and Koo netted at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium to deny Japan.

But while it was only Asia's second medal in the men's football tournament at the Olympic Games, Asia's women have had more success in recent years with China taking the silver

medal at the inaugural women's football tournament in the United States in 1996.

Led by the likes of Sun Wen and Liu Ailing, the Chinese reached the final by seeing off Brazil in the last four, but the hosts proved to be one obstacle too far and United States ran out 2-1 winners in the final.

Four years later, Sun was again amongst the stand-outs as she was the top-scorer in Australia with four goals in three group stage games. But neither the Steel Roses nor the hosts would reach the knockout rounds.

Instead it was the Nadeshiko, the Japan women's team, who also reached the semi-finals in Beijing in 2008, who matched China's 1996 achievement by reaching the gold medal match in London only to lose 2-1 to the United States.

Now, as the 2016 Summer Olympics prepares to kick-off in Brazil, another chapter in Asia's Olympic history is ready to be written.

Iraq will be aiming to go that step further in what will be their fifth appearance at the Olympics, while Japan and Korea Republic will strive to build on their successes in London.

In the Women's competition, a young China squad will be looking to return to past glories while Australia, having performed so impressively in qualifying, will be looking to fulfil their potential.

All five carry the hopes and expectations of the Asian game on their shoulders, and each one of will no doubt strive to do Asia proud.

ROLL OF HONOUR & HISTORY

Asian Qualifiers for the Olympic Games

MEN'S

1936 Berlin

Japan
China

1960 Rome

Chinese Taipei
India

1976 Montreal

DPR Korea
Iran

1992 Barcelona

Kuwait
Qatar
Korea Republic

2008 Beijing

China
Korea Republic
Japan
Australia

1948 London

Afghanistan
China
India
Korea Republic

1964 Tokyo

Iran
Japan
Korea Republic

1980 Moscow

Iraq
Kuwait
Syria

1996 Atlanta

Japan
Saudi Arabia
Korea Republic

2012 London

Japan
Korea Republic
United Arab Emirates

1952 Helsinki

India

1968 Mexico City

Japan
Thailand
Israel

1984 Los Angeles

Iraq
Qatar
Saudi Arabia

2000 Sydney

Korea Republic
Kuwait
Japan

2016 Rio de Janeiro

Japan
Korea Republic
Iraq

1956 Melbourne

India
Indonesia
Japan
Thailand

1972 Munich

Malaysia
Myanmar
Iran

1988 Seoul

China
Iraq
Korea Republic

2004 Athens

Korea Republic
Iraq

WOMEN'S

1996

China
Japan

2000

China

2004

China
Japan

2008

China
Japan
DPR Korea

2012

Japan
DPR Korea

2016

Australia
China





MEDAL OF HONOUR

CONSIDERED ONE OF THE GREATEST JAPANESE FOOTBALLERS OF ALL TIME, KUNISHIGE KAMAMOTO HELPED MAKE CONTINENTAL HISTORY AS THE FORMER FORWARD FIRED THE SAMURAI BLUE TO ASIA'S FIRST OLYMPIC MEDAL IN FOOTBALL AT THE 1968 SUMMER GAMES.

By: Sean Carroll **Photos:** Photo Kishimoto/Masahide Tomikoshi/Getty Images/Japan Football Association







Kunishige Kamamoto sits back in his chair and claps his hands together. "Ah, we did get something!" he remembers, having initially said he and his Japan teammates didn't receive anything aside from their medals after finishing third at the 1968 Olympics.

"The players went to the Imperial Palace after coming back and received congratulations from the Emperor, and on the way out we were given cigarettes," he recalls with a grin. "One box of 20 cigarettes each, wrapped up in the Emperor's chrysanthemum paper. I gave them to my dad and he was delighted."

Kamamoto and company were used to playing for glory alone, and being rewarded with tobacco for their efforts is far from the only thing that was different for footballers almost 50 years ago when Japan sensationally overcame the odds to claim bronze in Mexico.

"In our time we were amateur," the former Yanmar striker says. "In 1968 all of us had to go to work in the morning, then we'd go to football, and then go home. We didn't get anything at all for winning games. Players now get appearance fees and win bonuses

etc., but in the old days our pay from the company didn't go up if we won. We were just the same as regular salarymen."

Kamamoto, then, as Japan's all-time record goal scorer and the hero of that Olympics success, is quite possibly the most successful salaryman ever – not that anybody, including the man himself, had foreseen what was about to unfold as Shunichiro Okano's men set off for Mexico via Los Angeles in October, 1968.

"Before we went we hadn't been thinking about getting a medal; we hadn't even thought, 'We want to get a medal', as we didn't think we'd be able to win at that level," the 72-year-old, who scored 75 times in 76 games for his country, confesses. "We thought maybe if we could get out of the group and into the best eight, the same as at the Tokyo Olympics, that would be ok."

A 3-1 win over Nigeria in their opening game, courtesy of a Kamamoto hat-trick, transformed the atmosphere in the camp, though, and the team began to set their sights higher.

"It changed after that. We realised if we played with a strong defence and a quick attack we could win. The goals we scored were all from quick attacks, just me and (Ryuichi) Sugiyama and then a goal. When I scored none of my teammates were in front of

the goal with me."

Such a tactic worked wonders for the team, and was something that Kyoto-born Kamamoto relished.

"That's my personality; I wanted to win," he says. "I wanted victory. Even when I was driving, if someone overtook me I'd go, 'What's this car doing?' and then I'd have to get back past them. That's my personality, and so when I played games I wanted to win. I had to do the most; I had to score goals. I worked in training on scoring goals, I worked on my physique, on fine-tuning my technique - everything was to make me better at football, at scoring goals. I always played with that in mind."

Having made such an impact in the team's opening game, Kamamoto was a marked man in the following match against opponents who had more than enough attacking talent of their own: Brazil.

And the South Americans wasted no time establishing control of the game, with Ferretti giving them the lead in just the ninth minute. Japan stood firm after that but were unable to fashion any chances for their main man up front, meaning the heroics were left to a super-sub on this occasion.

"(Masashi) Watanabe came on in midfield, and until that point I'd not won a single header in front of goal from a Sugiyama cross," Kamamoto remembered. "But then Watanabe



came in from behind me and, 'pow!', he scored. We attacked with three. I was at an angle from the goal, Watanabe was in front of it, and Sugiyama was out wide. That 1-1 draw was big for us."

As well as serving as a psychological boost, Watanabe's 83rd minute equaliser delivered a vital point which left Japan's destiny in their own hands heading into the final group game against Spain.

"Going into that match Spain had four points, Japan had three, then it was Brazil and Nigeria. In the second half it was still 0-0. Spain knew they were going through, but who came first and second still had to be decided. Then, in the second half the Brazil-Nigeria score was announced over the PA system in the stadium. I heard it: 'Nigeria, tres, Brazil, uno.' Nigeria were winning 3-1.

"That meant Nigeria, who had no points, would jump up to two, and Brazil would drop down. So Japan knew we didn't need to win this game. We also knew if we came first we'd have to play Mexico in the quarter-final, which was a disadvantage, so at the end we were just passing the ball around. It wasn't match fixing or anything like that, it was just the way to play the game."

In the end it turned out they were cutting things a little fine as Brazil ultimately pulled themselves back to 3-3, but nevertheless

Far Left 1968
Olympic Games

Top Middle Against
Borussia Mönchengladbach

Bottom Middle, Above & Below
In Action For Club Side Yanmar



Japan achieved their pre-tournament target and progressed to the knockout stage, where Kamamoto grabbed another brace and Watanabe was on the scoresheet again as they beat France 3-1. That set up a semi-final against powerhouse Hungary, when the wheels finally came off.

"In that game it wasn't me that Hungary stopped, it was Sugiyama," Kamamoto recalls of the 5-0 defeat. "They knew the way the balls came into me was through Sugiyama, and so they made sure no balls came in."

Despite still being very much in the game at half-time, four second half goals saw Hungary cruise into the final – where they claimed their second consecutive gold medal – leaving Japan licking their wounds and facing hosts Mexico in the third place play-off.

Official records suggest there were over 100,000 fans in the Azteca Stadium for that clash, although Kamamoto dismisses such claims and believes it was more like 80,000. That still wasn't a bad crowd for the salarymen from Japan, though, and it was the biggest Kamamoto ever managed to win round, putting Japan 2-0 up with a first half brace.

"Towards the end of the second half, with around 10 minutes to go, Mexico missed a big chance and everyone started shouting, 'Japon! Japon!'" he says. "In those days there was only one ball, and so when you were





under pressure you could kick it high up into the stand. Before then when we'd done that the fans would throw it back as quickly as possible, but at that point they stopped and started playing volleyball with it, as if to say, 'the game's over already'."

And it was. Japan had achieved the unthinkable, winning bronze against the hosts – and all odds – with Kamamoto crowned as top scorer, with seven goals.

The man himself doesn't recall the celebrations being overly flamboyant, saying the players were exhausted and retired to their hotel for a nap, although a visit from Dettmar Cramer – who had played a huge role in helping Japanese football develop – does remain in his memory.

"Cramer came to our lodgings and he was over the moon," he says. "He'd become a European champion with Bayern Munich but he said, 'I'm happier now that Japan has won a bronze medal than I was then. It's a given that Bayern would win things, but for Japan to become number three in the world, nobody could predict that. You've made history. You guys have done something incredible, it's enough to make you cry.' I didn't, though!"

Above 2004 AFC Annual Awards

Below 2007 Kirin Challenge Cup



The triumph was heralded as a landmark moment in the development of the Japanese game, and is a large part of the reason why the Olympic football tournament is still followed so keenly in the country today.

While the women's side claimed silver at London 2012, however, the men have failed to pick up a medal since 1968 – although the first opponents for Makoto Teguramori's

young hopefuls in Rio this August offer an encouraging déjà vu.

"First up is Nigeria, same as us,"

Kamamoto says, before adding, with experience in mind, "If they win that they'll get confidence."

"I think it's a tall order to get through that group," he continues of Japan's pool, which also includes Colombia and Sweden. "They're playing strong teams – teams at a higher level than Japan. When you play strong teams there's a way of playing."

"You have to know how to play against stronger teams and sometimes that you have to defend. Japanese players often talk about playing 'their' football, but sometimes you need to adapt against the stronger teams."

"To progress it's about whether the defenders can resist the opponent's attacks. They have to defend for 90 minutes. That's what happened in the Nigeria game and we realised, 'if we play like this we can win'. And because of that we were able to achieve that result."

Some sound advice for this year's hopefuls, from a man who knows just what it takes to achieve Olympic glory.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

WITH A DISTINGUISHED CAREER AT BOTH CLUB AND NATIONAL LEVEL, IRAN CAPTAIN ANDRANIK TEYMOURIAN IS A VETERAN OF BOTH THE 2006 AND 2014 WORLD CUP CAMPAIGNS AS WELL AS BEING ONE OF HIS NATION'S MOST CAPPED PLAYERS. HE SAT DOWN WITH AFC QUARTERLY WHERE HE LOOKED BACK ON SOME OF TEAM MELLI'S RECENT SUCCESSES AND LOOKED AHEAD TO THE UPCOMING THIRD ROUND OF QUALIFICATION FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP.

By: Scott McIntyre Photos: Lagardere Sports







Andranik, the third round of qualification for the 2018 FIFA World Cup is almost upon us, what are your thoughts on the group that Iran has been drawn in?

The reality is that at this stage of qualification there are no easy matches and whilst some people might think it could have been more difficult we know full well the strengths of each of the opponents in our group. Syria have done well to reach this stage, Qatar are improving and China is developing their football very quickly and the important thing to realise is the detailed preparation that each of those nations have been enjoying to date.

Is there any nation in particular that you're concerned about facing?

This is a great challenge for our nation regardless of the opponent; all five of those nations deserve to be where they are and the one thing you can be sure of is that they'll be fully motivated when they face Iran and will sacrifice everything they have to ensure their success.

You'll be re-acquainted with Korea Republic in this upcoming stage of qualification and there's been a fair bit of tension the last couple of times the two nations have faced each other. Does that make it a more 'tense' clash when you face them?

No, not all. All of that is in the past and we respect Korea Republic just as we respect any nation that we face. People have moved on from those events that happened almost four years ago and we've got a new-look team with different individuals involved and I'm sure they do too. As two of the biggest nations in Asia we both want to win every time we play each other but for me there's no special tension to this match and what happened in the past is in the past and these matches will be a totally new challenge.

What are the main challenges that will await Iran in this group phase?

If you compare Iran to some of the other nations in our group we don't have the luxury of the same preparation that they do. China and Qatar, in particular, are able to attract high-quality opposition for friendly matches and enjoy lengthy training camps but Iran is still sleeping like three years ago and we've hardly been able to play any friendly matches before any of our major matches recently.

This is far from the ideal situation and is a disaster for the players and staff that have been working so hard to put the national team in a strong position to succeed.

You did though travel to Europe to play a friendly against Macedonia and also faced Kyrgyzstan at home prior to the upcoming stage of qualification.

With all due respect to those nations we need a tougher challenge [Iran defeated Macedonia 3-1 in Skopje and beat Kyrgyzstan 6-0 in Tehran]; if we want to succeed at a World Cup then we need to be facing the likes of the teams that regularly qualify and do well in those kind of big international tournaments, teams that are above our level.



Looking back on the second round of qualification where Iran finished top of Group D; were things easier than you expected?

Overall, you could say that but even then we did have some struggles against Oman, for example.

However, going undefeated in that stage was certainly a positive thing for Iran and whilst it might look easy on the outside we had to work hard for that success but we know that the real challenge will begin now in this final stage.

There have been a lot of new faces introduced to the national team since the AFC Asian Cup in 2015, how have you seen the evolution of the side in the past 18 months?

You're right but even further back than that the team has been evolving with a lot of changes over the past four years. We're now at the point where we have a really nice mix of older, experienced players and

Left FIFA World Cup Qualifying 2018

Above & Below AFC Asian Cup 2015



some very good young players coming into the team and that makes us a really exciting side.

Are there any of the young brigade who have stood out for you?

As the captain of the team, I don't want to point out one or two individuals because that can often make players complacent and we need not just the younger players but for every player in the squad to stay hungry. I've been impressed with the younger players when they arrive in training and they show that hunger and desire and to try and develop themselves as

players. We know now though just how tough these upcoming qualification matches will be and we can't afford to switch off even for a minute. The opponents we'll face are strong and we can't afford to let our concentration dip in training or matches because as soon as we



*Above & Below FIFA
World Cup Qualifying 2010*

*Right FIFA World
Cup Qualifying 2014*

do we'll lose – we have to, as a group, make sure we remain fully concentrated at all times and that applies equally to the younger and older players.

Part of the demand for excellence I imagine is driven by the fanatical support of the Team Melli fans. Can you explain just how passionate Iranian supporters are?

I mean this in a good way in saying that Iranian fans are crazy! Honestly you can't compare our fans to any other nation in Asia, possibly in the world. I've played all over the world for my nation and with different club sides and you don't see the passion you do for football in Iran; every match we play at home is a full house and the supporters are always singing and dancing.

With that though comes great expectation; do

you feel that pressure, especially when you play at home?

No, not all, this is usual for us. You have to remember that with no pressure there are no fans and this is part of our life as Iranian footballers and we want to succeed for these fans and for our country.

There's been a lot of speculation around the future of coach Carlos Queiroz for many years now as to how long he was likely to stay with the team. What are your thoughts on this situation?

I really hope that the Iranian Federation can work this out with Carlos because he deserves a lot of credit for how this team has evolved. People might not realise just what he has sacrificed to stay with this team, he's given up a lot and he never works just for himself; all the work he does, and he works very, very, hard is for the success of the team and for the success of Iran. Whatever misunderstandings there are I hope they can be resolved quickly.

For you personally, it must be a great honour for you to be captain of your nation.

Absolutely. After such a long career with so many fantastic players that I've shared the pitch with I'm thrilled that I'm able to lead Iran.

It's a big position and a big responsibility for me and for as long as I'm captain of this team I'll do my best to uphold the honour of that role and continue to give thanks for all those that have supported and continue to support me along this journey.

Looking back over that journey, what are the highlights of your career?

I hope the biggest highlights are still to come and that would be qualifying for and then doing well at the World Cup in Russia. Certainly though reaching Germany in 2006 was a big achievement and then after the pain of missing out in 2010 to return once again to the World Cup in 2014 was also massive.

With a little luck we could have made it to the second stage at that tournament and



that has to be our aim at the next World Cup.
I know though that not many players anywhere in the world get to represent their nation even once and then to play at two World Cups is even a bigger thing so I'm just so thankful for what this game has given me.

Why do you think it was that all the four AFC nations struggled in Brazil?

I think it's a combination of many factors, perhaps elements of tactics, or technique and maybe also mentality but you can see that football in Asia is continuing to improve and we hope to have greater success in Russia.

Even though Australia won the last AFC Asian Cup, Iran is still Asia's highest-ranked nation. Do you feel that your nation has earned that position?

Over the last four or five years we've been constantly improving and there was only really fine margins between greater success

and elimination in both Brazil and Australia. Whilst we still have a long way to go in terms of developing our youth players better I think Iran's success has been deserved and I personally feel that Iran is still the strongest nation in Asia.



Andranik Teymourian

Nationality: Iran

DOB: 06/03/1983

Position: Midfielder

Current club:

Saipa (Iran)

Previous clubs:

Oghab F.C.

F.C. Aboumoselm (both Iran)

Bolton Wanderers

Fulham (both England)

Tractorsazi Tabriz (Iran)

Al Kharaitiyat SC (Qatar)

Esteghlal (Iran)

Umm Salal (Qatar)

THE ULTIMATE DREAM

WINGER MAHMOUD AL MAWAS HAS BEEN A KEY PART OF SYRIA'S FAIRYTALE PROGRESSION TO THE THIRD AND FINAL ROUND OF WORLD CUP QUALIFYING AND THE MAN FROM HAMA CITY IS DREAMING OF GOING ALL THE WAY TO RUSSIA 2018

By: Zee Ko Photo: Lagardère Sports

Sitting in the lobby of the Emerald Hotel in Bangkok, where Syria are participating in the King's Cup, Mahmoud Al Mawas looks relaxed in a blue polo shirt and grey tracksuit trousers.

It is late in the evening, almost 9:30pm, and he is yet to have his dinner but the winger looks happy to answer any questions that might come his way.

It took 22 games for Al Mawas to score his first international goal for Syria, but the winger seems to have hit a purple patch of form since opening his account against Cambodia in September last year.

"I am a goal maker, not a goal scorer," says the man who has now netted five times in his last 11 games for Syria.

"I scored my first goal against Cambodia, but I also made two goals. If I can help my colleagues score goals, I am happy."

Syria's road to Russia 2018 has not been an easy one, with the team having to play all their home games in Oman as an added complication.

The Qasioun Eagles beat every team in their second round qualifying group bar Japan, a result that was enough to earn them a place in the next stage of the World Cup Qualifiers.

Two heavy losses (3-0 in Muscat and 5-0 in Saitama) to the Samurai Blue showed the gulf in quality between Syria and one of Asia's football heavyweights.

"As you know, Japan are one of Asia's top teams, you could even call them the Barcelona of Asia," Al Mawas explains.

"We played well but in the end we let in goals because of defensive mistakes."

While the team will not have to face Japan again in these qualifiers, the likes of Korea Republic, China, Uzbekistan

and fellow West Asian sides Iran and Qatar prove formidable opposition come September.

"The dream of any player in Asia is to qualify for the World Cup and to have qualified for the next stage is very important and good for Syria," Al Mawas continues.

"We are working on our dream to qualify for the finals and we know it is difficult but perhaps we can make it. Nothing is impossible, but it is difficult.

"For us, we think the strongest opposition will be Korea Republic but we will treat each match as a final because every team in the group is strong."

At 23 years of age, the Syrian winger represents a new generation of young, exciting players to have broken into the national team in recent years.

Alongside the likes of Osama Omari, Moayad Al Ajan, Hamid Mido and the ever-dangerous Omar Khribin, speedy Al Mawas is part of what looks like the core of the Syrian team in years to come.

"In the team, a lot of my colleagues are under 23 or 24 years of age," he says.

"We will continue to play and improve with instructions from our head coach to help the national team advance in all competitions.

"In a way, it is easy for us since we are already professional players and playing outside Syria. We know how to take instructions and [follow the game plan]."

While the winger is now one of the first names on coach Ayman Hakeem's team sheet, his father was initially against him picking football as a career.

"I started to play football when I was seven years old, at an academy team attached to the Ommal Hama team before moving to Al Karamah," he recalls.

"My father at first refused to let me be a football player since the sport is not very important in Syria. Few players had professional contracts and the money was not good.

"It was just a sport, an activity and for that reason, my father was against it. He wanted me to study and become a doctor or an engineer."

Luckily for Syrian football fans, Al Mawas' natural talent shone through as he earned rave reviews at his first couple of clubs.

"When I started playing for Al Karamah and earned my first professional contract, my father began to realise that I was a very good player," he continues.

"He started to like the idea of me playing football and even started driving me to training just about every day from Hama City to Al Karamah Sports Club, which was in another city 40 kilometres away!"

"That was when he changed his mind and started hoping that I would become a successful football player."

After his time at Al Karamah was followed by stints with clubs in Kuwait and Jordan, Al Mawas most recently appeared for Bahrain side Al Riffa and this summer chose to remain in the island country with a move to domestic powerhouse and 2008 AFC Cup winners Al Muharraq. And with Al Mawas' new club set to take part in September's AFC Cup quarter-finals, there could well be more continental glory on the horizon.

"Although every Arab player dreams to play professional football in Europe with a top club, my focus now is on helping the national team qualify for the World Cup. That is the ultimate dream," he says.

The boy who grew up idolising Brazilian footballer Ronaldo and watching the World Cup on a small television at home has come a long way.



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

INDIAN ICON BHAICHUNG BHUTIA MADE HIS OWN MARK ON THE GAME BUT NOW HE IS FOCUSED ON HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS AHEAD OF SEPTEMBER'S AFC U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP

By: Daniel Pordes Photos: Lagardère Sports/Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools/All India Football Federation

In a country of 1.25 billion, Bhaichung Bhutia's impact on the beautiful game in India stands out above all others. Famously described as "God's gift to Indian football", the AFC Hall of Fame striker played more than 100 international matches, a national record, and inspired his nation to reach the AFC Asian Cup finals in 2011 ending an absence of 27 years.

A trailblazer who became the first Indian footballer to sign a contract with a European club and the first to play professionally in England, Bhutia also helped India win the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup as well as multiple South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) titles.

But despite becoming a national icon within the sport, Bhutia still regrets what might have been.

"When I began my playing career, we did not have the proper training set-up in place in India. If we had, I would have become 10 times the player. I don't know where I would

have played, but I would have been better than I was," insists Bhutia, now retired and turning 40 at the end of this year.

"Back then the development system in India was a big challenge, which meant a lot of players suffered. There was never organised training at school and the training that was on offer was of a poor standard."

It's an issue that has remained close to the heart of the former East Bengal and Mohun Bagan star, who now takes an active interest in the development of Indian football with his own range of football schools and role as a Technical Advisor at the All India Football Federation.

Seen as a role-model for the next generation of Indian footballers, Bhutia, who grew up in the football passionate region of Sikkim, in the north-east of the country, was set on his path to greatness by his own local idols.

"When I grew up as a youngster, we didn't have cable network and access to world football. We couldn't even watch







Indian football," recalls Bhutia.

"So, for me, the local players were my idols. I could only watch football in my state and local area – so they were my heroes.

"When they played on the field you wanted to be like them. But also off the field, too, people knew them and recognised them and, when you saw them outside of the ground, they seemed humble, going and shaking hands with all the people, it was very inspiring."

The local players in Sikkim may have ignited the passion for football inside the young Bhutia but it was his uncle, Karma Bhutia, who helped to make the career a reality. At 14, Bhutia joined the Boys Club team in Gangtok, Sikkim's capital, where Karma was coach.

Karma Bhutia recognised his nephew's potential and assisted in a move to Kolkata where he would eventually join Indian giants East Bengal as the age of 16.

"I owe a lot to my uncle, he was the one who convinced my family to let me pursue my dream when most others wanted me to focus more on studies," says Bhutia.

"The hustle and bustle of Kolkata was hard to settle into for a boy who came from a nondescript village in Sikkim, but I was lucky to have him guide me through that period."

Two goal-laden spells at the Kolkata club, sandwiching a championship-winning stint at JCT Mills, culminated in 1999 with a move to England's Bury FC following trials with Fulham, West Bromwich Albion and Aston Villa.

The move was not only ground-breaking for an Indian footballer at the time, but also an eye-opener for Bhutia.

"The experience with Bury really changed me as a footballer, not just on the field but really off the field," says Bhutia. "The professionalism, the competition, the way football was run, that was completely different from India.

"In India we were still not serious; there was little importance in the sport. My time in England completely changed my mind-set on football."

While opportunities at Bury were limited due to injuries, in the international game Bhutia continued to flourish. Having already helped India to the 1997 SAFF Championship title, the striker was top scorer and MVP as India won the 1999 SAFF championship with Bhutia scoring in the final as the hosts defeated the Maldives 2-0.

His stop-start time at Bury came to an end in 2002 and Bhutia returned to Asia for spells at Mohun Bagan and Perak FA in Malaysia before a third stint with East Bengal with whom he won the inaugural ASEAN Championship in 2003 as tournament top scorer and MVP.

And after India had failed to retain their SAFF title in the 2003 tournament without an injury-hampered Bhutia, the talisman returned for the 2005 edition where he once again scored in the final in a 2-0 win over Bangladesh, picking up his third winners' medal and yet another MVP award in the process.

While Bhutia's club career continued to revolve around the two big Kolkata clubs as he appeared in back-to-back spells between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, he was to make his biggest impact on the wider continental stage at the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup as he led hosts India to a 4-1 victory in the final over Tajikistan, qualifying them for the 2011 AFC Asian Cup – India's first since 1984 – and was named the tournament's MVP.

"I am very happy that I could play a major role as captain of the team and help India win the tournament and qualify for the 2011 AFC Asian Cup," recalls Bhutia. "It was over two decades since we had qualified for the last one, so it was one of the best moments for me.

"The final was the game that sticks in the memory because after putting in so much work to get there, to miss out at the final hurdle would have been a big disappointment. Everything went exactly



as we wanted in the final. We scored early, and then went 3-0 up soon after to keep our momentum going, and remain in a comfortable position.

"To all the players it meant a lot, for a footballer it was the biggest achievement to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup."

Bhutia and India's reward was a dauntingly tough group at the 2011 AFC Asian Cup featuring heavyweights Korea Republic, Australia and Bahrain. And, with an injury-stricken Bhutia only able to make a cameo in the final game against the Koreans, India bowed out with three defeats.

That proved to be the end of Bhutia's international career having netted over 40 goals from more than 100 appearances. While his domestic career also began to wind down, his active role in Indian football development began to rise as he expanded on the first Bhaichung Bhutia Football School that was opened in Delhi at the end of 2010.

"One of the reasons why I started a football school was because I didn't get that kind of training system when I was a youngster," says Bhutia, with the youth football academy now reaching 10 different cities with over 18 centres.

"The idea behind it was there are a lot of kids who want to play football in India but they

Top Far Left SAFF Championship 1999

Bottom Far Left SAFF Championship 2005

Above Bhaichung Bhutia Football School

Bottom Right The official handover of 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup

Top Left AFC Asian Cup 2011

Bottom Left AFC Challenge Cup 2008

Top right Against Bayern Munich in January 2012

don't have access to the right training set-up this is where my school comes in."

Bhutia's passion for providing India's young footballers the opportunities that he did not have seen a natural progression into a role as Technical Advisor for the AIFF which he took over at the end of last year. With the AFC U-16 Championship kicking off in September in Goa and the FIFA U-17 World Cup also being hosted by India, having the nation's biggest footballing icon involved is a no-brainer.

"I am very happy to be part of the AIFF and be part of the long-term plan for Indian football development. To improve, we need strong youth development programmes which we've only really just started, but you can see the standard of Indian football is improving," says Bhutia.

"The quality of coaches that are coming in

is increasing and, while it's not been a drastic change, there have been good, positive changes.

"We have been getting great support from AFC and FIFA, and if we ourselves in the AIFF can continue our commitment and hard work in developing and bettering Indian football, and all these things come together, I am very, very positive in the future."

The new generation of players who will play at the 2016 AFC U-16 Championship, in particular, is one in whom the AIFF have placed a great deal of hope. September's hosts qualified for the tournament on merit after thrashing Bahrain and Lebanon by scores of 5-0 and 6-0 to finish in second place in Group E behind Iran.

"The AFC U-16 Championship is very important for us to really see the level of our side, and is great for our players because they will be playing against some of the best players on the continent. It's going to be a huge step for us to know where we are, and what we can improve upon," says Bhutia.

"We've given them all our support and we're hoping that this bunch of players – a group I think are highly talented – don't need to become the next "Bhaichung" but make their own name and can become a bigger player than I was in my career."



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

ALI ABBAS HAS SUFFERED MORE BUMPS IN THE ROAD THAN MOST FOOTBALLERS IN WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN AN EVENTFUL CAREER, BUT THE IRAQI IS SETTING HIS SIGHTS ON A NEW CHALLENGE AFTER ENDING HIS TIME IN AUSTRALIA WITH A MOVE TO KOREA REPUBLIC'S POHANG STEELERS

By: Daniel Pordes **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Pohang Steelers







Ali Abbas overcame one of the biggest challenges of his football career earlier this year when he returned to active duty following a horrific knee injury that ruled him out for 405 days.

Fully recovered from tears to the anterior cruciate ligament and medial collateral ligament in his left knee, Iraqi utility player Abbas is facing a new test after signing a contract to play for Korean giants Pohang Steelers in May.

Just the fourth West Asian to appear in the K-League Classic, the 29-year-old ended his seven-year spell in Australia where he appeared for Marconi Stallions, Newcastle Jets and, most recently, his beloved Sydney FC.

"To be honest, I've been in this situation before," says Abbas, speaking from his Sydney home just days before he moves to the industrial city in the south-east of the Korean peninsula.

"When I first came to Australia, I didn't speak the language, I didn't know anything about the culture, but I worked very hard to overcome these obstacles by immersing myself in both.

"It's going to be the same thing in Pohang.

Not only will I hopefully learn the Korean language, learn about the culture, but I will try my hardest to learn everything in a short time, and to win a trophy with this club. It's going to be a big challenge for me."

While interest for the move northwards was sparked by Sydney FC's pair of fixtures against the Koreans in this year's AFC Champions League group stage, a decisive factor was the contribution of a mutual friend of both the club and Abbas, former Iraq captain and Pohang player Abbas Obeid.

Obeid, along with compatriot Sadiq Saadoun, was among the first west Asians to play in the east when he joined Anyang Cheetahs in 1996, although it was a four-year spell at Pohang where the midfielder made a name for himself, memorably scoring the winning penalty in the 1998 Asian Club Championship final against Dalian Wanda.

For Abbas, Obeid was a role-model; someone whose shirt he literally wore when playing football as a youngster in Baghdad.

"I used to play with Obeid's nephew back in Iraq, and he helped me get one of his Pohang number 10 jerseys – I still have it," recalls Abbas.

"I remember watching the Asian Club Championship final back in Iraq, I was young when I saw the penalty shoot-out. I remember

Obeid missed the penalty the first time, but they let him re-take it and then he scored.

"When the club contacted my agent, Obeid was one of the people I spoke to about the move. He recommended the club, the city and encouraged me to take the opportunity to join the team.

"It will be a big challenge to fill Obeid's boots at Pohang, and even though he suggested I take his number, I told him wearing the 10 would be a bit much for me, so I'll ask for number 22."

Abbas, who became an Australian citizen in January 2012, made over 130 appearances in the A-League playing predominantly in left midfield while also seeing time in the centre and at left-back. The Iraqi also appeared in the AFC Champions League for the first time this year, helping Sydney FC to a first-ever Round of 16 place.

"The K-League is obviously a different kind of competition then Australia and Iraq, so it's going to help me become a better player. I wanted to see myself play in a different club, a different league and face a different challenge," says Abbas.

"Korean players have speed and technique, so if you can't match that you can't make it in the K-league. So you have to work really hard to be at that level.



"But I'm always trying to put myself under pressure because that's when I perform best. I like being in this kind of situation and I like the pressure, so I'm looking forward to the challenge and I'm really excited."

Persistence and hard work to overcome obstacles is a repeated mantra for Abbas. After all, he learnt it the hard way during the 14 months out of the game he had to endure while he recuperated from the tackle on 29 November 2014 that ruptured his ACL and tore his MCL clean off the tibia.

"It was really hard to come back from injury. I heard a lot of people say that I'm not going to come back from this. I'm not coming back to play football anymore. I'm finished," he recalls.

"A lot of big players did the same injury as me and they didn't come back the same. They couldn't come back and perform at 100 percent. But I put one thing in my mind: 'Don't listen to anybody else, just listen to yourself'. I spent a lot of hours in the gym and told myself I will come back and I will come back better than before."

Even his national team experience has been a lesson in overcoming adversity.

At just 21-years-old Abbas permanently wrote his name in Iraqi football lore as part of the historic side that secured the AFC Asian Cup in 2007 with 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia in

Left AFC Champions League 2016

the final. The triumph in Jakarta remains one of the most remarkable sporting achievements for the then war-torn nation, and a memory that "lives in my head".

"It was a very difficult time for the Iraqi people and I think in 2007 there was no happiness in the country," says Abbas, who came on as a late substitute in the final for the injured Bassim Abbas.

"So to put the Iraqi jersey on and represent my country was something incredibly special, and it was very important for me. And to be honest, I was very nervous each time. I was nervous before every game. But once you cross that line onto the pitch you have to focus and rise to the challenge.

"At the time I came on in the final, it was 1-0 to us and coach Jorvan Vieira said to me, 'You have to focus, don't go up, you have to defend.' So, of course, the first touch I had I took the ball from our box to the Saudi box. I passed to [striker] Younus Mahmoud and he was one-on-one with the keeper but he didn't score.

"That's why people remember that and recognise me, even though I only came on for the last seven minutes.

"I remember everything in those moments

Above AFC Asian Cup 2007

after the final whistle went. We were crying, dancing and cheering – everything. It was unbelievable. Winning the 2007 AFC Asian Cup gave something to the Iraqi people that they could be happy about."

A dogged determination and a desire to overcome obstacles might have prepared Abbas for the majority of challenges he might face in his new adventure at Pohang, but there is one that briefly flummoxes him: wearing the red and black striped shirt that is so reminiscent of that worn by Sydney FC's fierce rivals, Western Sydney Wanderers.

"Oh man, to be honest at least half of the Sydney FC fans brought up the fact I was joining a team wearing red and black stripes and they were not happy about it!" says Abbas.

"I was told that they wanted to support my future career but it would really be hard due to the shirts Pohang wear. I have nothing against the colours myself, but it's important that the name of the club is different from that team!

"I promised the club that if I left Sydney FC I'd move overseas and if I come back I'll join no one else but Sydney FC. I will represent my new team as best as I can, and work hard for the players and the fans. I will give my best and work hard like I always have, even if it's wearing red and black!"



Former Champs Jeonbuk Remain In The Hunt

Former winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and Al Ain along with Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv, Chinese duo Shanghai SIPG and Shandong Luneng, FC Seoul of Korea Republic, Al Nasr of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar's El

Jaish all secured qualification for the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League in May.

K-League champions Jeonbuk, who lifted the continental title in 2006, recorded a 3-2 aggregate victory over Australia's Melbourne Victory after winning the second leg 2-1 at home, while Shanghai, FC Seoul, Lokomotiv and Al Ain also recorded victories win their respective ties and advance to the last eight.

And Shandong, Al Nasr and El Jaish completed the quarter-final line-up.

A brace from Brazilian midfielder Leonardo in the 2-1 second leg victory at Jeonju World Cup Stadium secured Jeonbuk's place in the quarter-final stage for a second consecutive season after their draw in Melbourne a week earlier.

Winners of the inaugural edition, Al Ain earned a return to the quarter-finals after their elimination at the Round of 16 last year after beating Iran's Zobahan 2-0 in the second leg to seal a 3-1 win on aggregate.

Goals from Korean midfielder Lee Myung-joo and Colombian winger Danilo Asprilla at Foolad Shahr Stadium proved enough for the Emirati club after their 1-1 draw in the first leg at Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium.

"I am happy that we have achieved our target and made it through to the last eight," said Jeonbuk coach Choi Kang-hee.

"We knew it would be a tough game and it was. The games have been coming thick and fast for us and it makes it hard but the players have responded well. We are improving all the time and are ready for the next challenge."

Debutants Shanghai earned a place in the quarter-finals after beating Japan's FC Tokyo 1-0 to seal their place in the last eight on the away goals rule following a 2-2 draw on aggregate.

Wu Lei's strike in injury time at Shanghai Stadium proved enough for the Chinese Super League side after the same player had also scored a vital goal in the 2-1 defeat in Japan last week.



"It was perfect to score at the very last minute, as the goal also finished off Tokyo's hope of turning it around," said Shanghai coach Sven Goran Eriksson.

"We were the better side over the two legs so we deserved to win this match, and my players worked really hard to achieve it.

"The next round will be in September, so we've got time to prepare. We're excited and we hope to continue our journey further still."

Former finalists FC Seoul, meanwhile, came out on top in a penalty shoot-out with 2007 winners Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan as their 3-2 second leg victory was enough to cancel out their 1-0 loss in the first meeting at Saitama Stadium.

Dejan Damjanovic's opener in the Korean capital levelled the tie at 1-1 on aggregate and took the match into extra-time where the tournament's leading scorer Adriano put FC Seoul ahead, only for a Tadanari Lee double to seemingly put 2007 champions

Urawa into the last eight.

But Go Yo-han's stunning finish two minutes into added time took the tie to penalties and, after Yoshiaki Komai had missed Urawa's eighth spot-kick, Kim Dong-woo stepped up to

seal FC Seoul's passage to the last eight.

Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv also eliminated former continental champions in the form of two-time Asian Club Championship winners Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia in Tashkent on Tuesday.

Having drawn 0-0 in Riyadh in the first leg, the Uzbek League side qualified for the quarter-finals for the first time after goals from Islom Tukhtakhujaev and Sherzod Fayziev secured a 2-1 victory.

"I want to thank my players as they followed all the instructions of the coaching staff," said Lokomotiv coach Andrey Miklyaev.

"We worked on free-kicks and that gave us a big advantage. We had more chances than our opponents and we are happy with the victory."

Elsewhere, Al Nasr also advanced to the last eight for the first time despite a 3-1 second leg defeat to Iran's Tractorsazi Tabriz in the last 16 on Tuesday as the Emiratis claimed a 5-4 aggregate victory.

Sabri Lamouchi's El Jaish advanced with a 6-4 aggregate win despite losing 4-2 to fellow Qatar Stars League side Lekhwiya.

Three goals inside the first 20 minutes of the season half gave Lekhwiya – trailing 4-0 from the first leg – hope of a remarkable turnaround, but the dismissal of defender Chico Flores and a 70th minute goal from Romarinho ensured El Jaish progressed.





AFC Cup Kings JDT Lead The Way

Defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim as well as former winners Al Jaish and Al Muharraq joined Hong Kong's South China, Indian champions JSW Bengaluru, Tampines Rovers of Singapore, Lebanon's Al Ahed and Air Force Club of Iraq in securing qualification for the quarter-finals of the AFC Cup in May.

Malaysia's Johor had been hugely impressive in the group stage, after they signed off the first phase of the competition with a perfect record to top Group H, and they inflicted a comprehensive 7-2 defeat on Philippines side Kaya FC in the Round of 16 in Johor Baru to ensure their passage to the last eight.

There were also home wins for Al Ahed, Air Force Club and 2008 winners Al Muharraq, while 2004 winners Al Jaish of Syria, South China, Tampines and Bengaluru all advanced with away victories in the last 16.

"Qualifying for the quarter-finals is important, and I am happy and proud to see our team play well, especially in the first half," said Johor coach Mario Gomez, following the Round of 16 win.

"We showed we can play without Safiq Rahim, who is injured. Amirulhadi came in his place and did well, and he is also becoming an important player in the team.

"It was difficult playing on a wet pitch, but we handled the conditions well apart from one or two mistakes we made. It has been three months of heavy work where we played a match every three days, so we are looking forward to the mid-season break."

In Tehran, Mohammad Hamadko scored 12 minutes from time to ensure Group D runners-up Al Jaish a place in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 win over Iraq's Naft Al Wasat.

Nafit pushed hard for the equaliser to take the tie to extra-time but the Syrian side held out to book their first last eight appearance since winning the first edition of the continental competition twelve years ago.

Group D winners Al Muharraq also left it late in their last 16 clash with two-time continental champions Al Faisaly as the 2008



AFC Cup winners made the breakthrough nine minutes from time through Brazilian winger Kanu as they sealed a 1-0 win over the Jordanian club.

Tampines, meanwhile, secured their first quarter-final appearance since 2007 as they edged out India's Mohun Bagan in dramatic fashion after Afiq Yunus' strike deep into extra-time gave the Singaporean side a 2-1 victory in Guwahati.

Jordan Webb's opener on 63 minutes for the visitors was cancelled out in spectacular fashion less than 10 minutes later by Bikramjit Singh as he fired home from fully 30 yards.

But after 90 minutes of play were unable to separate the two sides, Group E runners-up Tampines were able to come out on top in the additional 30 after Yunus swept home from Jermaine Pennant's free-kick.

"Full credit to the boys, they fought on to the very end and came up with the

win," said Tampines coach V. Sundramoorthy following the win at Indira Gandhi Stadium.

"Jermaine Pennant was really good today, but then so were the other players. It was a team effort."

South China also needed extra-time to return to the quarter-finals for a second year running as a stunning strike from Brazilian Luiz Carlos on the 107th minute proved the winner in a 1-0 victory for the Hong Kong Premier League side at the home of Filipino champions Ceres La Salle.

However, South China's domestic rivals Kitchee were not as fortunate as they were narrowly eliminated in a 3-2 defeat at Mongkok Stadium by I-League winners Bengaluru.

The 2014 semi-finalists did take the lead at home thanks to Spaniard Rufino Segovia but a quick-fire brace from Bengaluru captain Sunil Chhetri but the visitors in front.

And although Jordi Tarres did level the scores before half-time, Daniel Lalhlipui's goal six minutes after the restart proved to be the difference as Bengaluru reached the last eight for the first time.

In the West, Air Force Club edged out Jordan's Al Wehdat thanks to first-half goals from Mohammed Abdul Wahid and tournament leading scorer Hammadi Ahmad in a 2-1 win at Tehran's PAS Stadium, while Lebanese side Al Ahed progressed to their first AFC Cup quarter-final since 2005 after Senegalese forward Mouhamadou Drame netted a brace in a convincing 4-0 win over 2004 runners-up Al Wahde of Syria.



Group Stage

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Ai Ahed	6	4	0	2	14	9	5	12
Al Wehdad	6	2	2	2	10	12	-2	8
Al Hidd	6	2	1	3	11	12	-1	7
Altyn Asyr	6	1	3	2	5	7	-2	6

23/02/16
Altyn Asyr 2 (Nour Mansour 57 OG, Amir Gurbani 74)
Al Ahed 0
Al Wehdad 2 (Francisco Torres 35, Ahmad Abukbeer 55)
Al Hidd 0
08/03/16
Al Ahed 3 (Mouhamadou Drame 31, Ahmad Zreik 74, Nour Mansour 88 pen) Al Wehdad 2 (Francisco Torres 36, Baha' Faisal 85)
Al Hidd 1 (Ali Haram 78) Altyn Asyr 1 (Serdar Geliyev 69)
15/03/16
Al Wehdad 1 (Francisco Torres 15) Altyn Asyr 1 (Amir Gurbani 2)
Al Hidd 2 (Mohammad Al Daoud 52, Ahmed Al Khattal 59) Al Ahed 5 (Hassan Chaito 4, Ahmad Zreik 16, Mouhamadou Drame 61, 74, Denis Iguma 85)
12/04/16
Al Ahed 1 (Mouhamadou Drame 60) Al Hidd 0
Altyn Asyr 0 Al Wehdad 0
26/04/16
Al Ahed 3 (Abbas Atwi 28, Hassan Chaito 36, Nour Mansour 45) Altyn Asyr 0
Al Hidd 6 (Uche Agba 6, 45+1, Sayed Adnan 49, 60, 84, Hussain Salman) Al Wehdad 2 (Francisco Torres 18, Abdallah Deeb 53)
10/05/16
Al Wehdad 3 (Ahmad Hisham 22, Mohammad Mustafa 32, Baha' Faisal 87) Al Ahed 2 (Hussein Haidar 3, Ahmad Zreik 83)
Altyn Asyr 1 (Suleyman Muhadov 98) 1 Al Hidd 2 (Ahmed Al Khattal 75, Uche Agba 76)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Nafit Al Wasat	6	5	0	1	9	3	6	15
Al Faisaly	6	3	2	1	10	6	4	11
Tripoli Club	6	2	1	3	8	10	-2	7
FC Istiklol	6	0	1	5	4	12	-8	1

23/02/16
FC Istiklol 0 Al Faisaly 0
Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Amjed Waleed 90+2) Tripoli Club 0
08/03/16
Al Faisaly 2 (Yaseen Al Bakheet 55, Salem Al Ajalin 78)
Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Amjed Waleed 90)
Tripoli Club 2 (Abdul Aziz 58, Walid Fattouh 87) FC Istiklol 1 (Oleksandr Kablash 55)
15/03/16
Nafit Al Wasat 2 (Jasim Mohammed 45+1 Mardek Mardkian 71) FC Istiklol 0
Tripoli Club 1 (Abou Al Mel 45) Al Faisaly 1 (Maher Al Jada 84)
12/04/16
Al Faisaly 3 (Baha' Abdelrahman 31, Mohammad Nahr 33, Yasser Al Rawashdeh 43) Tripoli Club 1 (Abou Al Mel 78)
FC Istiklol 0 Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Jasim Mohammed 90+2)
26/04/16
Al Faisaly 4 (Khalil Bani Attiah 33, 86, Wael Al Rifai 38, Yaseen Al Bakheet 59) FC Istiklol 2 (Alexander Kablash 69, Parvizdzhon Umarbayev 78)
Tripoli Club 1 (Abdul Youssef 78) Nafit Al Wasat 3 (Hamze Ali 8 OG, Amjed Waleed 45+4, Mustafa Karim 90+1)
10/05/16
Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Jassim Mohammed 52) Al Faisaly 0
FC Istiklol 1 (Fatkhullo Fatkhuloev 69) Tripoli Club 3 (Saad Youssef 46, Michael Helegbe 82, Walif Fattouh 86)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Air Force Club	6	5	0	1	15	7	8	15
Al Wahda	6	3	0	3	11	9	2	9
Al Dharia	6	2	1	3	7	10	-3	7
Al Orouba	6	1	1	4	5	12	-7	4

24/02/16
Al Dharia 0 Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 12, 41)
Al Orouba 2 (Abdulwasea Al Matari 54, Mohammed Al Lawati 89) Al Wahda 1 (Reja Rufe 88)
09/03/16
Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 14, Samal Saeedi 66)
Al Orouba 1 (Moussa Kone 77)
Al Wahda 0 Al Dharia 3
(Al Dharia awarded 3-0 due to decision by the AFC Executive Committee)
16/03/16
Al Wahda 5 (Reja Rufe 10, 32, 55, 56, Osama Omari 63)
Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 59, 80 pen)
Al Orouba 1 (Moatsem Al Shibli 67) Al Dharia 1 (Abdhalim Morjan 1)
13/04/16
Al Dharia 2 (Abdullah Morjan 4, Mohammed Fouada 65)
Al Orouba 0
Air Force Club 1 (Hammedi Ahmed 45+1) Al Wahda 0
27/04/16
Al Wahda 2 (Reja Rufe 45+2, Nasouh Al Nakdali 66) Al Orouba 1 (Lyle Peters 60)
Air Force Club 4 (Hammedi Ahmed 10, 61, Hussein Wahid 34, Bashar Rasan 67) Al Dharia 1 (Ahmed Thiab 79)
11/05/16
Al Orouba 0 Air Force Club 4 (Hammedi Ahmed 52, 56, 78, Moayad Ajan 83)
Al Dharia 0 Al Wahda 3
(Al Wahda awarded 3-0 due to decision by the AFC Executive Committee)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Al Muharraq	6	5	1	0	9	3	6	16
Al Jaish	6	3	1	2	5	3	2	10
Ahli Al Khalil	6	1	2	3	7	11	-4	5
Fanja	6	0	2	4	5	9	-4	2

24/02/16
Al Jaish 1 (Yousef Kalfa 78) Fanja 0
Al Muharraq 2 (Fahad Showaiter 5, Ismael Hasan 23 pen)
Ahli Al Khalil 1 (Mahmoud Wadi 15)
09/03/16
Fanja 1 (Imad Al Hosni 30) Al Muharraq 2 (Jamil Rashed 21, Elias 73)
Ahli Al Khalil 0 Al Jaish 3
(Al Jaish awarded 3-0 due to decision by the AFC Executive Committee)
16/03/16
Ahli Al Khalil 2 (Mahmoud Wadi 24, 65) Fanja 1 (Abdulaziz Al Maqbali 90+2)
Al Muharraq 2 (Ismael Hasan 29) Al Jaish 0
13/04/16
Fanja 3 (Abdulrahman Al Ghassani 15, 33, Imad Al Hosni 86) Ahli Al Khalil 3 (Ahmad Maher 4, 64, Mahmoud Wadi 46)
Al Jaish 0 Al Muharraq 2 (Ismail Abdullatif 34, Shohrux Gadoyev 47)
27/04/16
Ahli Al Khalil 1 (Mohammed Saleh 60) Al Muharraq 1 (Admir Catovic 32)
Fanja 0 Al Jaish 0
11/05/16
Al Muharraq 1 (Admir Catovic 60) Fanja 0
Al Jaish 1 (Mohammad Hamadko 85) Ahli Al Khalil 0

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Ceres La Salle	6	3	3	0	12	4	8	12
Tampines Rovers	6	3	1	2	10	6	4	10
Selangor FA	6	2	2	2	8	8	0	8
Lt. Sheikh Jamal	6	1	0	5	7	19	-12	3

23/02/16
Ceres La Salle 2 (Stephan Schrock 18, Adrian Gallardo 87)
Selangor FA 2 (Mauro Olivi 34, Mohamad Kamal 60)
Tampines Rovers 4 (Billy Mehmet 2, Hafiz Sujad 33, Afiq Yunos 52, Topu Barman 54 OG) Lt. Sheikh Jamal 0
08/03/16
Lt. Sheikh Jamal 0 Ceres La Salle 2 (Adrian Gallardo 25, 29)
Selangor FA 0 Tampines Rovers 1 (Fazrul Nawaz 26)
15/03/16
Tampines Rovers 1 (Hafiz Sujad 69) Ceres La Salle (Adrian Gallardo 88)
Lt. Sheikh Jamal 3 (Landing Darboe 29, Emeka Onuoha 65, Wadson Anselme 66) Selangor FA 4 (Patrick Wleh 39, Gopinathan Ramachandra 53, Mauro Olivi 70, 83)
12/04/16
Ceres La Salle 2 (Bienvenido Maranon 21, Adrian Gallardo 36) Tampines Rovers 1 (Billy Mehmet 64)
Selangor FA 2 (Ahmad Hazwan 16, Patrick Wleh 89) Lt. Sheikh Jamal 1 (Landing Darboe 35)
26/04/16
Lt. Sheikh Jamal 3 (Landing Darboe 20, 82, Emeka Onuoha 56) Tampines Rovers 2 (Fahrudin Mustafa 44, Billy Mehmet 70)
Selangor FA 0 Ceres La Salle 0
10/05/16
Tampines Rovers 1 (Yasir Hanapi 31) Selangor 0
Ceres La Salle 5 (Bienvenido Maranon 7, Adrian Gallardo 9, 57, 64, Jeffrey Christiaens 70) Lt. Sheikh Jamal 0

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Kitchee	6	4	1	1	8	1	7	13
Kaya FC	6	3	1	2	5	2	3	10
Balestier Khalsa	6	2	1	3	6	10	-4	7
New Radiant	6	0	3	3	2	8	-6	3

23/02/16
New Radiant 2 (Izzath Baree 50, Waheed Riwan 90+3)
Balestier Khalsa 2 (Muhammad Fazli 36, Muhammad Fadhl Noh 69)
Kitchee 1 (Rufino Segovia 69 pen) Kaya FC 0
08/03/16
Kaya FC 1 (Jose Porteria 90+4) New Radiant 0
Balestier Khalsa 1 (Zulkifli Hassim 31) Kitchee 0
15/03/16
Kaya FC 1 (Antonio Ugarte 48) Balestier Khalsa 0
Kitchee 0 New Radiant 0
12/04/16
New Radiant 0 Kitchee 2 (Rufino Segovia 17, 31)
Balestier Khalsa 0 Kaya FC 3 (Alfred Osei 15, Kenshiuro Daniels 25, Louis Clark 73)
26/04/016
Kaya FC 0 Kitchee 1 (Hirokane Harima 86)
Balestier Khalsa 3 (Zulkifli Hassim 23, Jamil Ali 32, Fadhl Noh 61) New Radiant 0
10/05/16
Kitchee 4 (Jordi Tarres 39, Rufino Segovia 50, 61, Cheng Chin Lung 76) Balestier Khalsa 0
New Radiant 0 Kaya FC 0

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Mohun Bagan	6	3	2	1	14	9	5	11
South China	6	3	0	3	9	9	0	9
Yangon United	6	2	2	2	10	10	0	8
Maziya	6	1	2	3	8	13	-5	5

24/02/16
Yangon United 2 (Kyun Ko Ko 19, Marcelo Fernandes 48)
South China 1 (Ryan Griffiths 15 pen)
Mohun Bagan 5 (Sony Norde 19, Jeje Lalpekhlu 33, 69, Cornell Glen 35, 72) Maziya 2 (Imaaz Ahmed 61, Raju Gaikwad 77 OG)
09/03/16
Maziya 1 (Ahmed Rasheed 64) Yangon United 1 (Kyun Ko Ko 87)
South China 0 Mohun Bagan 4 (Lenny Rodrigues 15, Sony Norde 39, Cornell Glen 44, Jeje Lalpekhlu 83)
16/03/16
Maziya (Ahmed Rasheed 51 Cheung Kin Fung 68 OG)
South China 1 (Chan Siu Kwan 36)
Mohun Bagan 3 (Sony Norde 10, Jeje Lalpekhlu 21, 66)
Yangon United (Marcelo Fernandes 34 pen, 64)
13/04/16
Yangon United 1 (Adison 26) Mohun Bagan 1 (Cornell Glen 42)
South China 2 (Law Hiu Chung 35, Chan Siu Ki 42)
Maziya 0
27/04/16
Maziya 1 (Asadhulla Abdulla 65) Mohun Bagan 1 (Jeje Lalpekhlu 90+3)
South China 2 (Ryan Griffiths 40, Mahama Awal 84)
Yangon United 1 (Kunihiro Yamashita 24)
11/05/16
Mohun Bagan 0 South China 3 (Law Hiu Chung 18, Ryan Griffiths 24, Mahama Awal 33)
Yangon United 3 (Marcelo Fernandes 18, Kyi Lin 54, Zaw Min Tun 66) Maziya 2 (Asadhulla Abdulla 52, Ismail Easa 83)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Johor Darul Ta'zim	6	6	0	0	21	3	18	18
JSW Bengaluru	6	3	0	3	9	10	-1	9
Ayeyawady United	6	2	0	4	12	20	-8	6
Lao Toyota	6	1	0	5	8	17	-9	3

Lao Toyota 2 (Kazuo Homma 2, Phatthana Syvilay 34) JSW Bengaluru 1 (Chekkyot Kizhakkevettill Vineeth 90)
Johor Darul Ta'zim 8 (Safiq Rahim 5, 49, 63, Pereyra Diaz 14, Marcos Antonio 31, Juan Martin Lucero 82, 87, Aidil Zafuan 89)
Ayeyawady United 1 (Thiha Zaw 7)
09/03/16
Ayeyawady United 4 (Christopher Iyikwobe 22, 32, 55, Aung Kyaw Naing 78) Lao Toyota 2 (Sithideth Khanthavong 64, 89)
JSW Bengaluru 0 Johor Darul Ta'zim 1 (Safiq Rahim 55)
16/03/16
Ayeyawady United 0 JSW Bengaluru 1 (Sunil Chhetri 34)
Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Safiq Rahim 62 pen 74 pen, Amri Yahyah 90+2) Lao Toyota 0
13/04/16
Lao Toyota 1 (Phatthana Syvilay 42) Johor Darul Ta'zim 4 (Safie Sali 47, Fadhl Shas 65, Amri Yahyah 78, Jorge Diaz 82)
JSW Bengaluru 5 (CK Vineeth 21, Alwyn George 61, 89, Seminen Doungel 66, Beikhhokhei Beingachho 81) Ayeyawady United 3 (Thiha Zaw 44, Christopher Chizoba 69, 78)
27/04/16
Ayeyawady United 1 (Thiha Zaw 27) Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Amirul Hadi 31, Safie Sali 87)
JSW Bengaluru 2 (Eugeneson Lyngdoh 45+1, Kim Song-yong 60) Lao Toyota FC 1 (Kazuo Homma 68)
11/05/16
Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Safiq Rahim 70, Safie Sali 78, Shakir Shaari 90+1) JSW Bengaluru 0
Lao Toyota 2 (Phoudary Phommaseane 29, Sithideth Khantavong 87) Ayeyawady United 3 (Christopher Chizoba 41, Min Min Thu 50, 81)

Round of 16

Ceres La Salle v South China
24/05/16
Ceres La Salle 0 South China 1 (AET (Luiz Carlos 107)

Mohun Bagan v Tampines Rovers
24/05/16
Mohun Bagan 1 (Bikramjit Singh 72) Tampines Rovers 2 (Jordan Webb 63, Afiq Yunos 116)

Al Ahed v Al Wahda
24/05/16
Al Ahed 4 (Abbas Atwi 12, Abdelrazag Al Hussain 75, Mouhamadou Drame 88, 90+3) Al Wahda 0

Air Force Club v Al Wehdad
24/05/16
Air Force Club 2 (Mohammed Abdul-Wahid 15, Hammedi Ahmed 37) Al Wehdad 1 (Abdallah Deeb)

Kitchee v JSW Bengaluru
25/05/16
Kitchee 2 (Rufino Segovia 7, Jordi Tarres 42) JSW Bengaluru 3 (Sunil Chhetri 31, 33, Daniel Lalhimpua 51)

Johor Darul Ta'zim v Kaya FC
25/05/16
Johor Darul Ta'zim 7 (Juan Lucero 14, 54, 70, Jorge Diaz 23, Azamuddin Akil 33, 40, Mahali Jasuli 69) Kaya FC (OJ Porteria 53, Antonio Ugarte 88)

Nafit Al Wasat v Al Jaish
25/05/16
Nafit Al Wasat 0 Al Jaish 1 (Mohammad Hamadko 78)

Al Muharraq v Al Faisaly
25/05/16
Al Muharraq 1 (Karu 81) Al Faisaly 0



The Asahi Shimbun AJW

KEEPING AN EYE ON ASIA AND JAPAN



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Quintet Secure Place In Qualifying Third Round

South Asian champions India, 2007 AFC Asian Cup co-hosts Malaysia, Cambodia, Tajikistan and Yemen all advanced to the third round of 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers following the first round of qualifying play-offs in June.

The five sides took their place alongside the 12 other nations that had advanced following the 2018 FIFA World Cup/2019 AFC Asian Cup joint-qualifiers.

India, who finished runners-up at the 1964 AFC Asian Cup, fought back from a goal down to hand play-off opponents Laos a 6-1 defeat in the second leg in Guwahati to complete a

7-1 aggregate win after Jeje Lalpekhlu's goal in Vientiane had given the reigning SAFF champions a narrow advantage from the first meeting.

Malaysia, too, enjoyed a large margin of victory as they record two 3-0 wins over Timor Leste to complete a 6-0 aggregate scoreline, and they were joined in the third round of 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifying by fellow Southeast Asians Cambodia who defeated Chinese Taipei 4-2 on aggregate, thanks to a 2-0 win in the second leg in Phnom Penh in front of 50,000 fans following a 2-2 draw in Kaohsiung City.

Bangladesh were also on the receiving end of a heavy defeat in their first round playoff, with a 6-0 aggregate defeat to Tajikistan while

back-to-back 2-0 wins for Yemen over the Maldives saw them join the Central Asians in the pot for March's third round.

Chinese Taipei, who finished third and fourth respectively at the 1960 and 1968 AFC Asian Cups, Laos, Timor Leste, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Bhutan will battle it out in the second and final phase of the play-offs, which starts in September and concludes in October.

The three victorious sides in the final playoffs will complete the 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifying picture, with 24 teams competing for one of 12 remaining slots on offer at the 17th edition of Asia's flagship tournament that is set to be hosted by the United Arab Emirates.



2/06/16

Chinese Taipei 2 Cambodia 2
Laos 0 India 1
Malaysia 3 Timor Leste 0
Tajikistan 5 Bangladesh 0
Maldives 0 Yemen 2

6/06/16

Timor Leste 0 Malaysia 3
Malaysia win 6-0 on aggregate
Bangladesh 0 Tajikistan 1
Tajikistan win 6-0 on aggregate
Cambodia 2 Chinese Taipei 0
Cambodia win 4-2 on aggregate
India 6 Laos 1
India win 7-1 on aggregate
Yemen 2 Maldives 0
Yemen win 4-0 on aggregate



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U-14 Girls' Regional Champions Crowned

ASEAN								EAST ZONE								SOUTH & CENTRAL							
Group A								Group A								Group A							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Thailand	3	2	1	0	7	2	5 7	Japan	3	3	0	0	28	0	28 9	Iran	3	3	0	0	12	0	12 9
Philippines	3	2	1	0	6	3	3 7	Korea Republic	3	1	1	1	26	4	22 4	Tajikistan	3	1	1	1	5	5	0 4
Cambodia	3	1	0	2	3	5	-2 3	China	3	1	1	1	20	5	15 4	Bhutan	3	1	0	2	3	12	-9 3
Laos	3	0	0	3	2	8	-6 0	Northern Mariana Islands	3	0	0	3	0	65	-65 0	Kyrgyzstan	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3 1
31/05/16 Laos 1 Philippines 3 Thailand 3 Cambodia 0 01/06/16 Philippines 2 Thailand 2 Cambodia 3 Laos 1 02/06/16 Laos 0 Thailand 2 Cambodia 0 Philippines 1								17/05/16 China 2 Korea Republic 2 Japan 23 Northern Mariana Islands 0 18/05/16 Korea Republic 0 Japan 2 Northern Mariana Islands 0 China 18 19/05/16 China 0 Japan 3 Northern Mariana Islands 0 Korea Republic 24								26/04/16 Tajikistan 0 Iran 3 Kyrgyzstan 1 Bhutan 2 27/04/16 Iran 2 Kyrgyzstan 0 Bhutan 1 Tajikistan 4 02/04/16 Tajikistan 1 Kyrgyzstan 1 Bhutan 0 Iran 7							
Group B								Group B								Group B							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Myanmar	3	2	1	0	5	2	3 7	DPR Korea	3	3	0	0	46	1	45 9	Bangladesh	2	2	0	0	12	1	11 6
Vietnam	3	1	2	0	2	1	1 5	Chinese Taipei	3	2	0	1	20	7	13 6	India	2	1	0	1	10	3	7 3
Malaysia	3	1	1	1	2	3	-1 4	Guam	3	1	0	2	1	39	-38 3	Nepal	2	0	0	2	0	18	-18 0
Singapore	3	0	0	3	2	5	-3 0	Hong Kong	3	0	0	3	0	20	-20 0								
31/05/16 Myanmar 1 Vietnam 1 Singapore 1 Malaysia 2 01/06/16 Vietnam 1 Singapore 0 Malaysia 0 Myanmar 2 02/06/16 Myanmar 2 Singapore 1 Malaysia 0 Vietnam 0								17/05/16 Guam 1 Hong Kong 0 Chinese Taipei 1 DPR Korea 7 18/05/16 Hong Kong 0 Chinese Taipei 4 DPR Korea 24 Guam 0 19/05/16 Guam 0 Chinese Taipei 15 DPR Korea 15 Hong Kong 0								26/04/16 India 1 Bangladesh 3 27/04/16 Nepal 0 India 9 28/04/16 Bangladesh 9 Nepal 0							
Semi-Finals								Semi-Finals								Semi-Finals							
04/06/16 Thailand 2 Vietnam 0 Myanmar 1 Philippines 5								21/05/16 Japan 5 Chinese Taipei 0 DPR Korea 5 Korea Republic 0								30/04/16 Iran 3 India 4 Bangladesh 9 Tajikistan 1							
Third Place Play-off								Third Place Play-off								Third Place Play-off							
05/06/16 Vietnam 2 Myanmar 1								22/05/16 Chinese Taipei 2 Korea Republic 4								01/05/16 Iran 7 Tajikistan 0							
Final								Final								Final							
05/06/16 Thailand 1 Philippines 0								22/05/15 Japan 0 DPR Korea 3								01/05/16 India 0 Bangladesh 4							

Jordan, Bangladesh and DPR Korea successfully retained their titles, while Thailand dethroned Vietnam at the AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championships played across the West, South & Central, East, and ASEAN zones between April and June.

At the end of April, Jordan topped a group that contained Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Palestine to lift their fourth straight West Zone title. Having finished top of the four-nation table with seven points, hosts Jordan have now won the regional championship every year since its inception in 2013.

Meanwhile, in Dushanbe, Bangladesh defeated former South & Central zone winners India and Nepal in the group stage before thrashing hosts Tajikistan 9-1 in the semi-finals. In their return meeting with India, Bangladesh cruised to a 4-0 win to claim back-to-back titles.

In May, DPR Korea topped a group that contained Chinese Taipei, Guam and Hong Kong before downing Korea Republic and Japan in the semi-final and final respectively to retain their East zone title with a 100% record in China.

However, in Vientiane a new regional champion was crowned in the ASEAN zone. Defending champions Vietnam were beaten 2-0 in the semi-finals by Thailand, who would crown an unbeaten record with their second title after they defeated the Philippines 1-0 in the final.

WEST ZONE

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
JORDAN	3	2	1	0	18	4	14	7
BAHRAIN	3	2	0	1	8	10	-2	6
UAE	3	0	2	1	5	6	-1	2
PALESTINE	3	0	1	2	5	16	-11	1

27/04/15

Jordan 1 United Arab Emirates 1

Bahrain 3 Palestine 2

28/04/15

United Arab Emirates 2 Bahrain 3

Palestine 1 Jordan 11

30/04/15

Jordan 6 Bahrain 2

Palestine 2 United Arab Emirates 2

AFC Boosts Football Development in Myanmar

A total of 5,400 ultra-durable footballs have been distributed to the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) today as part of the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) efforts to strengthen grassroots football and social development in the Southeast Asian nation. The ultra-durable One World Futbol never needs a pump and never goes flat, even when punctured.

The contribution by the AFC is part of collaborative efforts with the One World Play Project to enrich lives and enhance social development through football.

"Across our continent, our beautiful game continues to be a beacon of hope and inspiration for people of all backgrounds," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"Today's contribution exemplifies the AFC's Vision and Mission to leverage on the powerful platform of football to

strengthen and improve communities.

"Looking ahead, the AFC will continue to expand its efforts with our Member Associations to harness the power of football to educate, empower and enrich those in need."

Since the launch of the partnership in 2013, the AFC has donated more than 175,000 ultra-durable One World Futbols to 23 Member Associations, reaching close to three million children, far exceeding the initial agreement and target of 83,000 footballs.

"The Myanmar Football Federation and our stakeholders would like to thank the AFC and One World Play Project for this generous contribution," said MFF President Zaw Zaw.

"In every way, this contribution will enhance not only our efforts in expanding the reach of football in Myanmar, but also provide the most marginalised communities to lead more fulfilling lives and inspire them to excel through football."



Team Visits Tajikistan

An AFC Futsal Development team concluded its assessment visit to Tajikistan at the end of May. The assignment was aimed at developing the sport in the Central Asian country and the three member delegation were received by Vice President of the Tajikistan Football Federation Dilshod Juraev.

"We will provide our best to assist and cooperate with the team and exchange ideas for the good of the game and we hope to gain as much knowledge as possible from this visit," said Juraev.

The AFC team conducted various meetings, field visits and inspections during the assessment visit and Ali Targholizadeh, Director of the AFC Futsal and Beach Soccer Development Department, who led the delegation, presented on the game's general outlook and current activities in Asia.

"This assessment visit programme aims is to raise the standard of futsal in Asia," said Targholizadeh. "Futsal is key to creating talented and skilful players for football.

We will do our utmost to assist the TFF in all areas to make the fast-paced game more successful in the country."



AFC Holds Inaugural Refereeing Expert Workshop

The Asian Football Confederation registered a major milestone when its first Refereeing Expert Workshop kicked off recently in Kuala Lumpur in May.

Seventeen refereeing experts gathered for the three-day workshop to look at how AFC can move forward in the field of refereeing development.

It is the first time that all the top AFC Instructors in both the technical and fitness areas were put together in a single programme working towards designing and setting the groundwork for future programmes and activities.

The main focus was to review and refine course programmes, daily activities in competitions, evaluation of match officials and designing training plans. Attention was also given to evaluation and selection of new instructors, assessors and referees in AFC.

The experts made a presentation related to three key areas - Referee Assessors/Instructors, Men and

Women Referees as well as Referee Fitness Test and Development. The instructors were divided into three groups who reviewed current practices and provided their suggestion and shared ideas to enhance and improve these areas.

"This will also serve as a pilot project and we envision that the workshop would one day be expanded to include experts from the other confederations," said Director of the AFC Referees Department Shamsul Maidin.

"They should use the workshop sessions to brainstorm ideas and come up with suggestions for improvements. Although refereeing in AFC has achieved many

successes and set a very high benchmark, it is important to reflect and review all current practices in order to move forward."

Fernando Tresaco Gracia, a world renowned educator of referee instructors, was a guest speaker at the workshop which was also attended by former Director of the AFC Referees Department and now Consultant Yoshimi Ogawa.



Health Awareness Held In Jordan & Laos

An AFC Health and Anti-Doping Awareness Outreach Programme was organised in conjunction with June's AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship for the ASEAN and West zones in Laos and Jordan.

The programme aimed at providing important social and scientific information on health and doping matters to the young players at the competition and providing them with fun and enjoyable learning experiences.

It also aimed to enhance and promote better understanding of the value of football and health.

"It is imperative to educate players at a young age to provide insights on the importance of healthy lifestyle and to avoid drugs for their future career," said Dr. Mya Lay Sien, an AFC Medical Officer from Myanmar.

Several activities were held such as video presentations on healthy lifestyle and football for health messages.

Stations were created covering various topics such

as the 11 Rules to Prevent Doping in Football, anti-doping quizzes and artwork displays, nutrition, hydration, smoking and alcohol harmful effects exhibitions.

Basic health checks were provided and health brochures distributed to the participants, with briefings conducted for team doctors/physiotherapists by AFC Medical Officers.



Draw For 2017 AFC Cup Playoff Qualifiers Takes Place

The draw for the 2017 AFC Cup playoff qualifiers took place in Kuala Lumpur in June, with the nine teams learning their opponents

in August's qualifiers that take place in Kyrgyzstan, Bhutan and Mongolia.

Two-time AFC President's Cup winners Dordoi of Kyrgyzstan will be the hosts of Group A featuring Macau's Casa Benfica and debutants Rovers FC of Guam.

In Group B, nine-time Mongolian champions Erchim will face-off in Ulanbataar against FC Cambodia's Nagaworld FC and Three Star Club

from Nepal will face off in Group B.

FC Tertons of Bhutan, meanwhile, will look to go one better than countrymen Druk United who

failed to progress at last year's qualifying competition when they entertain Sri Lankan side Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra Ltd and Chinese Taipei's Tatung FC in

AFC Cup Playoff Qualifiers

Group A	Dordoi (KGZ), Casa Benfica (MAC), Rovers FC (GUM)
Group B	Erchim FC (MNG), Nagaworld FC (CAM), Three Star Club (NEP)
Group C	FC Tertons (BHU), Sheikh Russel KC Ltd (BAN), Tatung FC (TPE)

Group C.

Each group will play a one-round league, wherein each club in the group shall play one match against every other club. The three group winners will advance to the Playoff stage of the competition.

AFC And OFC Sign Cooperation Agreement

The AFC and the Oceania Football Confederation signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen cooperation and dialogue between the two confederations following the conclusion of Mays's FIFA Congress in Mexico City.

The main focus of the cooperation agreement between the AFC and the OFC is the possible future collaboration between the two Confederations with regard to competitions and hosting national and clubs sides as well as an exchange of information and expertise to improve both technical and administrative training.

"In Asia we recognise the many challenges that are shared by our friends in Oceania but we can also see great opportunities," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"We will aim to work closely together in three key areas – competitions, education and development. But this MoU also allows us to exchange information, knowledge and good practices which will re-inforce the values of fair play, team spirit and integrity.

"At the AFC we have always believed that all Confederations must work together – both big and small – to reunite the game under the FIFA flag. Only then can we restore confidence and trust of the people in football –

and particularly in those who run football.

"Today I believe we are taking another crucial step in uniting world football and with unity will come strength. Asia wants to build a better future for our great game and we want football to be united in delivering that future."

The AFC already has MoUs in place with Confederation Africaine de Football, Confederation of

North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football and UEFA as well as FIFA and several European Leagues.

"This is an excellent opportunity to draw on the knowledge and experience across the 47 AFC Member Associations, while we can share the expertise we possess in Oceania," said OFC President David Chung.

"This is the beginning of a symbiotic relationship which will benefit all of our Member Associations and I would like to thank my counterpart and the AFC Executive Committee for your commitment to the betterment of football.

"We are incredibly excited to be collaborating with one of our closest neighbouring Confederations and we are looking forward to the advantages the strengthening of our relationship will bring."



Injury Surveillance Study

The AFC and Aspetar have forged a pilot partnership which will pave the way for some of Asia's best clubs to obtain valuable information on injury occurrence, patterns and prevention.

With the growing demands on players to perform at their optimum level, the study will further augment the AFC's Vision and Mission to ensure the success of Asia's players and teams on the world's biggest stages.

To kick-start the AFC Champions League Injury Epidemiology Study, which will include the eight quarter-finalists from this year's AFC Champions League, club representatives met with Aspetar researchers on June 14 to pilot a study that will systematically investigate injuries and illnesses as the continent's premier club competition enters its decisive stages.

The pilot programme will be essential to test the feasibility and identify needed adjustments. If successful, further stakeholders within the Asian football family will be invited to join the AFC and Aspetar in the next step: the roll-out to all 32 clubs in

the coming seasons of the AFC Champions League.

"While there is abundant information on European players, for example the UEFA Champions League study, we know little about injuries in Asian players," said Dato' Dr Gurcharan Singh, Chairman of the AFC Medical Committee. "This study will finally fill this void and enable us to focus our prevention efforts."

Maximising the return-on-investment and potential outcomes, the study will concentrate on compliance by club medical staff, data quality and reliability, completeness of data, data transmission mode, effective communication as well as potential language and translation difficulties.

"Aspetar is committed to taking our services as a FIFA Medical

Centre of Excellence for the region and the Asian continent to the next level," said Dr Mohamed Ghaith-Alkuwari, Director General of Aspetar.

"This pioneering collaborative initiative with the AFC Medical Committee is a critical step in protecting Asia's player potential."



Asian Refereeing Trios Get Olympic Nod

Three men's and two women's referee trios from Asia have been selected to officiate at the Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016.

They are among 88 match officials from 40 countries whose appointments have been confirmed by the FIFA Referees Committee.

The men's competition will see 18 referees and 32 assistant referees officiate and at the women's tournament, 14 referees and 24 assistant referees will be on duty.



AFC MEN'S REFEREE TRIOS:

- Referee: Fahad Al Mirdasi (Saudi Arabia)
- Assistant Referees: Abdulah Al Shalwai, Mohammed Al Abakry (Saudi Arabia)
- Referee: Alireza Faghani (Iran)
- Assistant Referees: Reza Sokhandan, Mohammadreza Mansouri (Iran)
- Referee: Ryuji Sato (Japan)
- Assistant Referees: Toru Sagara, Hiroshi Yamauchi (Japan)

AFC WOMEN'S REFEREE TRIOS:

- Referee: Rita Gani (Malaysia)
- Assistant Referees: Allyson Flynn (Australia), Naomi Teshirogi (Japan)
- Referee: Ri Hyang-ok (DPR Korea)
- Assistant Referees: Hong Kum-nyo (DPR Korea), Cui Yongmei (China)

Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium

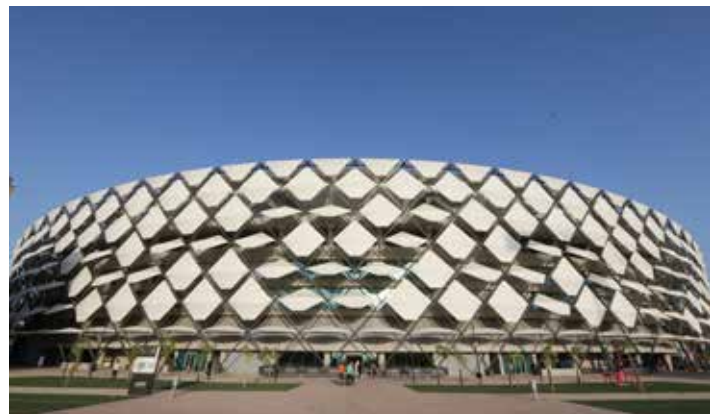
Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

The award-winning Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium is a multi-purpose 25,000 capacity venue in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Completed in January 2014 and used by inaugural AFC Champions League winners Al Ain, the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium attracted a capacity crowd for that year's AFC

Champions League semi-final second leg between Al Ain and Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia. The striking venue has also hosted European clubs including Manchester City, Roma and Hamburg.

The stadium covers an area of 45,000 square metres and is 50 metres high, making it one of the tallest buildings in Al Ain City. It hosts more than 3,000 premium seats, one of the highest ratios of premium seating in the

world for football stadia. The design of the outer facade is based on the trunk of the palm tree, an integral part of the UAE's heritage and legacy, while a sinuous and gravity-bending parasol roof shades the pitch and the spectators during a match. The stadium is located close to the main highways linking Al Ain to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, with Al Ain Airport just 15 minutes away.



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.....
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developing.
Right now I
think I’m just
reaching a
footballer’s
ideal age,
hopefully
I haven’t
peaked
just
yet.”**

WU LEI
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